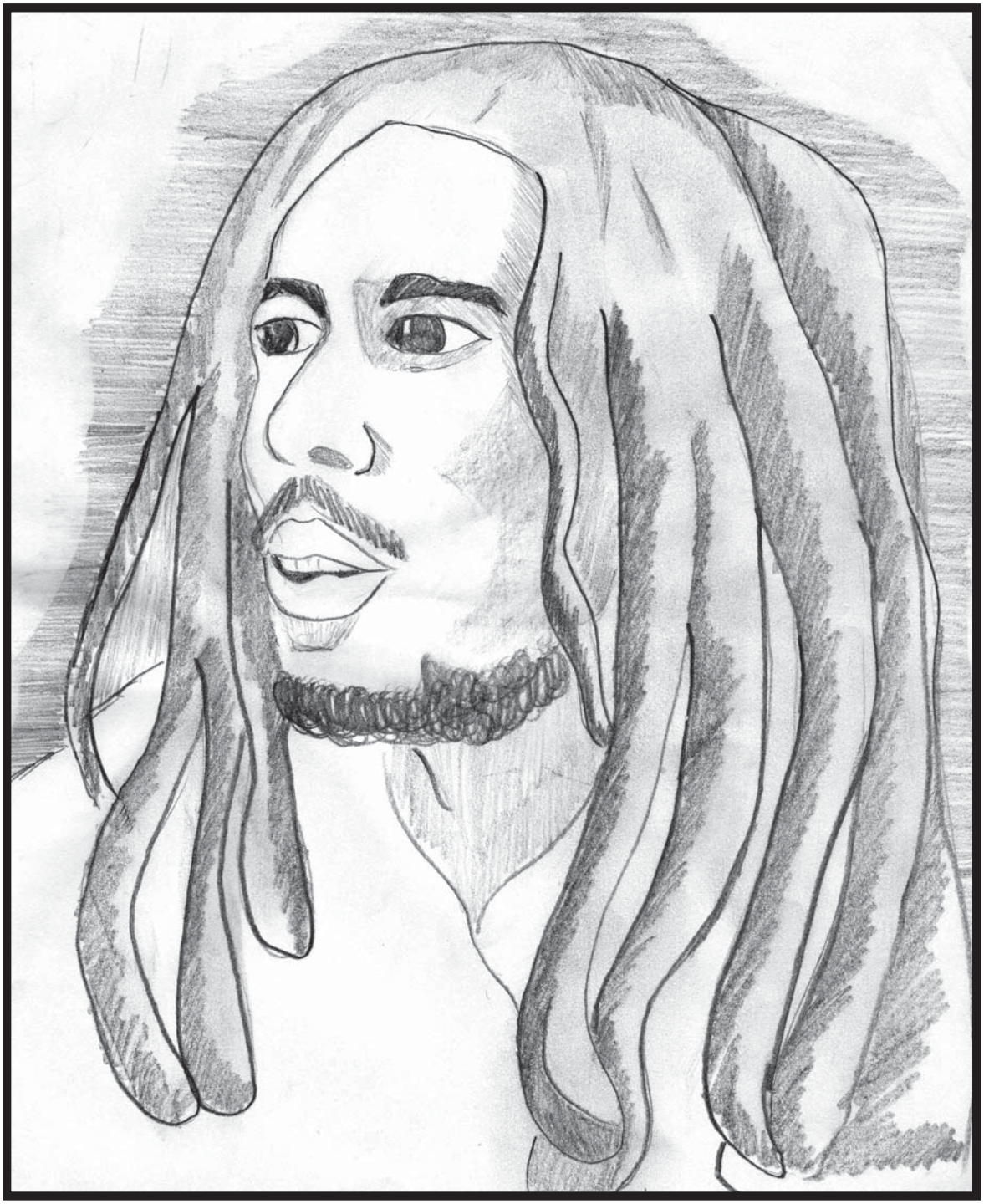

thinkin' 'bout the day everything went down
should i have walked straight or gone all the way around
thinkin', thinkin', more like reminiscin'
'bout my life right now that i keep missin'
hopin' someone will listen

check out the rest of Big Vic's POW on page 9

EDITOR'S NOTE VOLUME 12.03

Welcome editorial note readers, it's good to be back, with another fabulous Beat to share with you all. Well here we are, issue 12.03, a wonderful issue filled with plenty of insights from you stellar writers. Well, before you move on, we are encouraged that you have read this much of the editor's note, and we hope you don't stop now, given our ol' friend and colleague Will "The Poetic Prisoner" Roy has jumped at the chance to write this latest note, so with that said, and no need for further introduction, Will Roy!

A week ago, during our most hectic time of the week — a Tuesday afternoon when we're just finishing up our topic meeting, printing out Big Beats, and getting prepared for workshops — we received an air mailed letter from a man on death row in Kamwe, Zambia. That's in the continent of Africa! Our first reaction was, "How the hell did The Beat Within publication get to Africa?" Then the next reaction was, "That would make a great editor's note!"

When I went home that evening I thought about it for awhile and came up with some obvious ways The Beat might've gotten over there. You know, someone who's incarcerated might've mailed a Beat to someone they knew over there, someone might've gotten out of jail fed up with this country and relocated over there, or maybe someone on our mailing list thought it would be a good idea to send something as precious as a Beat to a man in need from Africa.

At this point, I realized that all these reasons were imagined and to focus on them would be a big waste of time, for sooner or later, assuming he'll keep in touch with us, this mystery will come to the light. So I furthered my thinking and began focusing on a couple ideas I got from the letter he wrote to us, which is published in this issue in The Beat Without section.

The first idea was that of humbling myself. Everyone has their own list of struggles and obstacles to overcome, but sometimes we get so caught up in our own lists that we forget there are people in the world that have it way worse than us. That's what I experienced when I read his extremely humbling letter. And as I read it my heart went out to him in its own way. I didn't give a sigh of sympathy aloud, nor did I even express my compassion. I just silently wished I could talk to this man face to face and maybe offer an attentive ear. In return I know this man would give me many things to think about. One of them definitely being how to hold my own head up, even when things around me are looking so down.

He has a strong hold on his spirituality even while going through things like being on death row, away from his four children and wife who spent most of her time taking care of the house while he was the breadwinner. He probably had to deal with a tremendous amount of guilt after being snatched away from a family where he was their only means of survival. And not only that, but to add salt to the already jaw dropping wound, he learned that him and his wife are HIV positive. Yet he still holds firm to his belief that one day things will be better. He still has hope and that says a lot for a man in such a situation as his.

The second idea I got from reading his letter was one we're sure we've stated over and over again, but the reason why we do so is because many unexplained occurrences like this have been happening to us lately. We can't stress enough how important writing is. And when we say writing, we mean writing... Sure it's more convenient to just start up a computer and receive an email from someone who may have been thinking about you two minutes ago. Or even being able to type thoughts out of your head onto a computer faster than you could think those thoughts. But there's something about old-fashioned paper and pen.

Even as we write, our most respected Beat colleague is going through his own technical difficulties with his computer. Technology has made things easier in ways, but it's also made us dependent on it. Computers crash, cell phones break, and iPods need to be charged. So there are many ways in which we can lose information on these devices. However, when one writes something with paper and pen, something special happens that no form of modern technology can mirror.

The mere process of having a thought flow from your brain to your hand when writing is perfect for allowing time to fully prepare the idea that's being projected. Not only that, but when you write something on a piece of paper it's more intimate than any other form of communication because not only is it documented, but you have to hold on to it if you want to read it. You have to put it in a safe place if you want to read it again and again. It becomes a part of you in a way. Almost like it's its own person. When you write a piece it's yours but it sort of carries a character of its own. It brings up feelings in other people, influences ways of thinking, and can offer things like hope, love, and happiness just like a human being.

So the question shouldn't be, "How the hell did The Beat get to Africa?" but rather what's the meaning behind organically and fatefully expanding like The Beat Within has. We're sure David Inocencio, friend of mine and founder of The Beat, never dreamed The Beat would be receiving a letter from Africa when he started this back in '96. It just goes to show you how much this publication is needed... For in a place where people are isolated from the luxuries of physical freedom, technology being one of them, something as simple as a black and white weekly could be the source of so many fruitful connections, beneficial relationships. There's something magical about it...

The magic is the many great authors and teachers we publish each week. Every person has a soul. Every person is a walking experience and perspective. We've all led our own distinct lives, with ups and downs that differ from anyone else in the world, so when something as powerful as a publication lets us share these experiences, there's no limit to the type of opportunities and lessons that may arise. We give something of ourselves that is so valuable — our personal stories, our views, our beliefs and disbeliefs — while receiving the very same from people all over the country, and as evidence from this most recent letter, even the world.

We can take it or leave it... It's a piece of paper for crying out loud... But if we take it, it's an act that's intimate. For what you now hold in your hands is not just a bunch of writings from people who are incarcerated. It's documented souls... It's a vast network of perspectives, ideas, and experiences from those that people are either too scared to listen to, too ignorant to understand, or too disconnected to even care...

There's nothing like The Beat in the world and that's why when people get a hold of one, they grow attached to it. From this editor who started with The Beat in its backyard, San Francisco Juvenile Hall (YGC), to someone who lives as far away from us as Africa, many of us recognize the importance of The Beat. And if you recognize that, you have no choice but to recognize and respect the power of good ol' paper and pen. Those were my thoughts as I wondered, "How the hell did The Beat Within get to Africa?"

The topics addressed prior to the writing featured in this issue were, "What Is Your Way Out?" - We hear so many people say that they need to get away from the lifestyle that they are living. Some may think that their options are limited. The reality is there are so many different paths to go, but there is only one that you can take at a time. What is your way out? What will it take for you to make it out the hustla's life, gangbanging life, street life, whatever life you are leading right now. Tell us what is your way out of the criminal justice system.

The second topic, "The Last Time I Felt Wanted..."

Third topic, What's Cold? (Please Describe)

Lastly, "What Role Has Santa Played In Your Life?" - Looking back in the days of your childhood, for many of us Santa played a big part in the whole Christmas Spirit and how you would go about the entire year just to make sure Santa would come to bring you the best of things. However, now that your are older and wiser, tell The Beat about your Santa and how he did or did not take care of you Christmas Day.

Before we call it an ed note, lets praise our latest POW (Piece Of the Week) recipients, they are Atl, Lil' Freddy, Dizzy Birdman Dwan, Big Vic (writes two), Jacob (writes two), Baby G-life, Lil' Man Man, and Sunshine all from the 150 Crew. From Arizona we have Jaquilla, Brayan, and Kyle (writes two). From SF/YGC we have Meen (writes two), Young Weezy, G-Baby, D'Mario, John, Alvin, Jacky, Ali, and Athena. From Walden House we Bobbie and Sara, and lastly we have Christina from Santa Cruz.

In closing, lets send this issue out to you writers who took on our latest ed note writing contest – A Letter To The President (featured on page 54). Last week, we featured two contributions and in this 12.03 issue we feature the remainder of the contributions. Wonderful stuff! Thank you writers for stepping up and penning a letter to the president. See you soon!

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The Beat Within, a weekly newsletter of writing and art by incarcerated youth, is published by Pacific News Service.

At The Beat Within, we go through a lot of trouble to censor inappropriate sexual remarks, foul language, and gang references. There is enough tension in our commuities already–we don't aim to bolster it. It is in The Beat's interest to promote peace and unity. Our goal is to educate one another.

The Beat Within publishes the opinions and views expressed by the participants in our workshops. This is simply the pure voice of the youth. The views you read do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher, editor or staff. All rights are reserved. Nothing from this publication can be reproduced without our written permission.

To our writers: What you write could be hazardous to you. Your words have consequences, and could be used to incriminate you. Try to illuminate your feelings and viewpoints without running the risk of providing ammunition for those who might use your words against you.

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Art: Much props to everyone for the great art this week.

Spiritual Advisor: Jack Jacqua

Special Volunteer: Nancy DeMartini

Book Donor: Marisela Norte

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Writers: Thanks to all the participants in our workshops in the San Francisco's Youth Guidence Center and Log Cabin Ranch School and the Walden House Facility, Maricopa County, Arizona, Walden House, Santa Clara, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, EPA Charter, RAP High School, Alameda County, Santa Cruz County and Marin County Juvenile Halls. As well as Natural Bridge in Virginia, and Hidden TREWTH in Rhode Island. If you have any questions or comments about The Beat Within, or if you would like to become a subscriber, contact us at: 275 Ninth St. SF.CA. 94103 or call (415) 503-4170 or check us out at:

www.thebeatwithin.org

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From The Beat: From the Youth Guidance Center also known in these pages as SF/YGC comes the fifth installment of writings from the B3 Butterflies. Thanks goes out to their wonderful teacher and our friend Megan Mercurio who challenged her class to write letters to San Francisco Mayor, Gavin Newsom. We understand the class sent their letters to Mayor Newsom but never received a reply. Isn't that a shame. We bet he is one busy man, but we're sure if not him, he could have at least had one of his assistants or an intern reply on his behalf. These young ladies as you will soon read step up huge in questioning the environmental issues in the Bayview Hunters Point. Read on! With that said, this will be the last installment from the B3 Butterflies, but word has it Megan will be working with the max unit, so we look forward to their first installment of knockout writings, under what name is the next question?

B3 Butterflies

Each and every day we meet as an English class for nearly two hours, and try to make sense of our lives and the world around us. We do this by getting to know the characters on the pages of the literature we read, and by examining our own lives so that we can leave the institution transformed and empowered young women. Our writing arises from our souls, and from the myriad experiences we have endured in our short time on earth. Judge us not, simply take in our words with an open heart and learn from the emotions and stories of our lives.

The following letters were written to Mayor Gavin Newsom after our environmental unit, which focused specifically on Bay View Hunter's Point and the contamination therein. Theses letters were sent some time ago, and the mayor has yet to send any letter of response to any of these passionate letters. We hope the letters enlighten you as to some of the injustices occurring here in San Francisco.

Special Thanks: Dana Warden

-Megan Mercurio, SF/YGC Teacher

Dear Mayor Newsom

My name is Christina, I am 17 years old, and I go to Ralph J. Bunche (School) in Oakland. Well, first of all, I don't live in San Francisco, but I am a concerned citizen. Yes! I do know people that live in the Bayview.

The site contains more than 325 toxic sites and 30% of it is hazardous waste sites, which equate to environmental racism. Some other factors such as social isolation and lack of healthy food are partly to blame for the bleak public health picture of those living in the neighborhood. It doesn't make any sense health wise.

So when are you going to start doing something about it? How are you going to do something about it? Why haven't you been doing something about it?

If you can write me back.

Sincerely,

-Christina

Dear Mayor Newsom

My name is Symone and I currently attend Wallenburg High School, and I am a junior. The Bayview Hunter's Point area of town relates to my life because I have family that live in the area that has been affected by the hazardous conditions. I am a concerned citizen that lives near the Bayview area. I am not a resident, but have stayed over there with family member's homes that live in that area. I have friends and family who live in Hunter's Point.

There have been some astonishing facts that been brought to my attention like in the Bay View area there are 325 toxic sites in this little area, which is mostly populated by lower class minorities. It has also been brought to my attention that of the five percent population that the Bay View makes up, thirty percent of the city's toxins reside in this little area.

Hypothetically speaking, what if your family and friends lived in this area and were at a high risk of getting numerous diseases? I feel that as the mayor you could be doing more to help these people get out of a bad living situation. It is not their fault they do not have a lot of money to live in the Sunset and the Marina areas where there is probably little or no pollution. I am looking forward to your response and I hope you take my letter seriously.

With much concern,

-Symone

Dear Mayor Newsom

My name is Guerra and I am 15 years old and have been living in San Francisco for the majority of my life. Many of my family lives in the Bayview Hunter's Point neighborhood and I will soon be living there once my daughter is born. I am very concerned with the well being of me and my family.

It has been brought to my attention that the Bayview Hunter's Point area is extremely contaminated. There are more than 325 toxic sites in the area and not many efforts have been made. However, what really bothers me is that why does such a small area have 30% of the city's hazardous waste sites?

My question is why do you concentrate on paving roads that are already smooth?

Or why fix parks and recreational centers that don't need to be fixed? Why not focus on the areas that need fixing especially when the area is so polluted? Also, if it was the Avenues or the Presidio, this wouldn't be happening. I would really appreciate it if you could at least make and effort to save the neighborhood.

Sincerely,

-Guerra

Dear Mayor Newsom

My name is Dominique and I was born in San Francisco and then moved to Solano County. Bayview does not relate to my life because I am not from there and I have never lived there. I do have friends that live there, but they don't care about the environment and stuff like that.

I have information on the pollution in the Bayview District, and I think that it's messed up that you clean up other communities, but when it comes to Bayview or communities with African Americans or Latinos you do not do anything. We would like a clean environment. And instead of making new Juvenile Halls and new parks, come help us clean up our community because right now what you are doing is environmental racism. When it comes to Caucasian people, you just go ahead and do whatever they want.

Why can't you help the Bayview District? Why are you trying to make 3rd Street look better? Are you trying to kick African Americans out too? You just need to act like a real mayor and do your job and not just help the rich folks, but help everybody. And I want something back that lets me know you read my letter Mr. Newsom.

-Dominique

Dear Mayor Newsom

Hi, my name is Sade, I'm 16 years old, and I attend the Principal Center; but at thIS time I go to Woodside Learning Center due to the fact that I'm in custody at Youth Guidance Center.

I am a very concerned native of San Francisco because of the issues that are going on in the Bayview Hunter's Point area. I would have to say that Hunter's Point relates to my life because it IS my life. I've been living there since I was in my mother's stomach. So all the negativity that affects BVH, affects me.

I have lots of friends that live by the pollution in Huntersview/ Middlepoint and I do not think that it is fair that you guys are not trying to clean up that area. There are a lot of people with different diseases and they should not have to be contaminated due to you guys not wanting to clean it up. So my main question I want to ask is why does Hunter's Point have to be considered as they grimiest area in SF? Is it just because you guys want to keep the minorities area looking bad? I hope not, because that is cruel. So, I just hope you can clean up my part of the city because we need the most help if you did not know.

With much concern,

-Sade

the only thing you're good for is looking pretty and having money handed to you.

Dear Mayor Newsom

My name is Monica, I am 15 years old and I have been living in San Francisco my whole life. All of my family lives in San Francisco, and I'm writing to you from YGC. I think what is going on in Hunter's Point is hurting the majority of the people who do not want, but need something to be done about what is going on.

There is too much pollution going on. I'm writing you this letter to tell you or to see if you can stop building things such as jails and other buildings that don't matter and help the people in Hunter's Point that are getting sick from all the pollution. Help them.

With much concern,

-Monica

Dear Mayor Newsom

My name is Brandi and I live in San Francisco, CA. in the Fillmore/Haight area. I have lots of friends who live in the Bayview, Hunters Point area, and I recently received information regarding their living arrangement being uprooted due to your decision to "clean" the area and rebuild better quality homes. These, in turn, will be much more expensive, and the current residents (my friends) won't have the income available to reclaim their old living territory and with no help from the state, be able to do so. Having this been said, I am outraged at your decisions of reconstruction and disregard of the current people living in the area.

So please tell me, is this part of your new plan to help existing residents live in a healthier environment? To have more stable living arrangements and get a better education in turn to have the capacity to improve later generations and their living environment?

And secondly, why are there any portions of people let alone by large portions of people, living day by day on more than 325 toxic sites? Why not build non-toxic grounds to begin with? In the long run, you are paying more to demolish and build, than to clean and rebuild an overcrowded land that you know should just turn into landfill anyway.

In conclusion, my opinion is that you have no business being mayor. And while I will agree that you are trying your best, your best apparently excludes the poor, the minorities, the uneducated and anyone that goes without. Therefore, the only thing you're good for is looking pretty and having money handed to you.

-Brandi

PIECES OF THE WEEK

Without Being Wanted

at eleven years old this lil' girl lost her daddy
by him walking out on her
strugglin' with the pain that he left her
thinkin' he's go' come back home with a new bike
or a new baby doll to surprise her with but now
the surprise that he brought her was fear and
heartache
crying to her mother to put a hand on her shoulder
but the only thing that she put on her shoulder
was not a helpin' hand but an evil hand
to keep her worried about where her daddy is
for her to be wanted, the only thing
that she wished for, to have him back
it's crazy 'cause he only wanted that crack
therefore she chose to live the street
but now she's older and she can't believe
that she made it through without being wanted

-Atl, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Major props, power, praise, blessings, hope and better days to you! Yes, you made it through, the pain they caused you and the pain you caused yourself in the street life. Ain't nothing too nice in either of those periods of time in your life, but somehow you did what you thought you had to do — and now that you've grown older and wiser, you see that you made it through the heartache and soul-wrenching confusion of not being wanted or loved. You didn't know how to love, so you looked for it in the craziest places, in the craziest faces, but now you look in the mirror and see the love you always needed to feel nearer — let your own heart's need, offer tender care to the face you see the mirror. Past all fear, you deserve the best you can deliver to yourself whom you must cherish and hold dear. And believe, many of our readers will feel exactly as you do, coming to their senses in here of all places — no place to be, and yet maybe the safest they've known. Now mother and father yourself, 'cause you deserve so much more than the pain through which you've grown ... into ... being ... you at last! Beyond your painful past!

Cold Life, Early Death

what's cold is how all these
youngstas dyin'
over some petty stuff
what's cold is the life
some people choose to live
especially the street life
it ain't coo'
what's cold is how my ninjas
reese g-dubb emmit lil' davon lil' bob
and drew had to leave this earth
what's cold is a kid can never
choose the family that he is born to
so some kids face certain things
in their life
that can be their downfall
while others have families
that help them get by in life
what's cold is how the state
can spend one hundred and eighty-four
million dollars on a juvenile hall
but can't spend it on schools
what's cold is i am stuck
in a place that i can't get out of
right now but
when i do i have plans to succeed in life
r.i.p. all that are gone
gone but never forgotten

-Lil' Freddy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Thanks for a great piece! We wish the memory of those gone, fallen to the street life for the reasons you name, could be remembered not just by T-shirts and certainly not by threats of revenge — but by investing in these lost children who deserve better than what they're born into. Thank God that you realize you have a choice, because too many never do. And if that failure is partially on them, it's on all the rest of us, too! RIP deceased children of the street. Don't have to go to Baghdad or even New Orleans, to see it: America, awaken to save your dying children — regardless of race, religion or origin, local or global!

Guns, drugs, and thugs are all I know
Please show me right from wrong
before I go

One Way Out Or Another

I'm trying hard to get out of these streets, where they're selling dope and I used to be the best hustler you ever met. But I'm changing to be regular people like everybody else.

I've seen people dead on the block in Oakland where I grew up and lived, near the BART station five minutes away. I'd hear lots of bullets fired from guns — Bam! Bam! Bam! I thought it was the Fourth of July, but it ain't. Somebody was dead. I saw my best friend's dad dead in the car, the blood everywhere in the car.

My mom's trying to get us out of these ghetto streets so she can raise me to be a man — but I already became a hustler! And that's because of growing up in the Oakland streets. I'll never forget how somebody's dad was dead in a car when I was a very young teen — never forget, not in one hit, to forget.

-Dizzy Birdman Dwan, 150 Crew

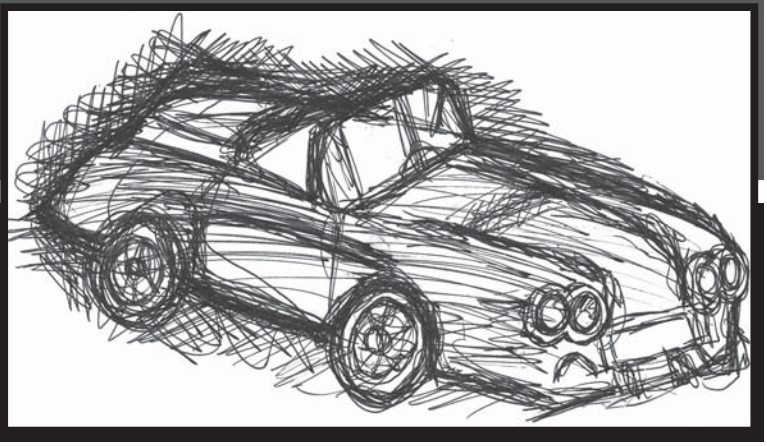
From The Beat: Ah, what a terrible memory, and a generally terrible story. There are legitimate hustles, too, you know. Actors have to hustle hard, taking this job and that while they audition for parts in plays and movies. Why not focus on taking some acting classes at Laney or Merritt and learn that trade? Then hustle to your heart's content, but not in the streets where hot lead gets spent. Let that memory motivate you to refuse to rest content with your hustle in the street.

Truth of Addiction

Guns, drugs, and thugs are all I know
Please show me right from wrong before I go
What I do is wrong but it's all I know
I don't want the scars to show, but it's all I know
Everybody says that I'm my own worst foe
But please forgive, because it's all I know
I must help myself before I go
For guns, drugs and thugs
I don't want to know

-Kyle SEF, Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: Guns, drugs and thugs... Can you become addicted to this kind of life? Growing up with these things around you can be quite stressful and hurtful. Guns, drugs and thugs are all things that represent destruction and ill will. One of the first things to do when you are addicted to something is to acknowledge that you really do have a problem. The next thing you must do is step away from the addiction. Guns, drugs and thugs don't have a healthy place in anyone's life. Acknowledge and step away...



PIECES OF THE WEEK

Love The Hall

The hall has never been anything for me but another place to make my stompin' grounds. Every time I have been to the hall I have met new people to bring along on my missions. The hall has also made me hate authority figures more. My hall staff would kick my door in the middle of the night just to scare me. They would provoke me to go off on people. They would restrain me and mess up my shoulder hecka bad and pepper spray the shhh outta my face. But eventually I grew to get used to it after about the 8th or 9th time.

I love being in my hall because they notice my feelings, which was the whole reason I acted out at home. But nobody understood or could step outside themselves for a moment to hear my outcries. And trust and believe when I tell you it was very obvious that I needed some attention. I did everything from putting my head through our house walls to putting an unloaded gun to my head and walking through my house with it. Yet still nobody noticed because there were so many cracked out knacks skippin' around my house tryin' to vacuum up the flies that weren't even there.

Nobody cared what was in my head, only what was in my pocket. In my hall nobody wanted anything from me but me and my thoughts, true personality. I know it is not right to like it there, but I do.

-Bobbie, Walden House PSK

From The Beat: What makes this sad, sad piece a POW is the brave honesty it took to write it. You have the courage to look inside — your family, yourself, your friends, your 'hood — and that kind of courage is rare. All children crave attention, and if they can't get it in positive ways, they'll get it in negative ways. When you acted out, you got the attention you wanted. But it wasn't really the attention you needed, and that's what you are figuring out now. Your description of walking unnoticed through the house with a gun to your head reminds us of a wonderful old movie that we'd like to recommend to you, even though the reasons for not being noticed are very, very different. The movie is called "Harold and Maud" and we think you'll like it. You might even recognize some of yourself in the main character... You have two major tasks to achieve, and if you achieve the first — staying sober — it will be so much easier to achieve the second — finding a loving family of your own making that is strong, healthy and cares for one another.

Help From The Halls

What's up with The Beat? Man, this your boy GF-Baby and I think the halls did help. It helped me go get my act together and get my mind right. I think God put me in here to let me know I need to slow down. I guess I been doing too much.

It also helped me with my patience. I used to always want things then and there and now. But now I can wait. I know time heals. Even though I don't like being here I think this place is probably saving my life because I was in a lot of shhh, and I admit I needed help. I probably could have got killed being on the out, or probably even killed somebody and been in here for my whole life instead of this year I'm 'bout to do at Log Cabin Ranch.

This is probably a learning experience to let me know this is what could happen if I keep doing what I'm doing. And I admit jail ain't for me. I can't keep coming back and forth to jail. I don't see how people do it.

-G-Baby U4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Its good that you're taking it upon yourself to really examine your life from the inside out. This is a perspective that most people in your shoes don't have enough heart to face, or are just too blind to see the situation for what it really is. You are approaching your time at the Ranch with maturity and responsibility, and those virtues will pay big dividends in the future. If you hold onto this mindset, you will gain the knowledge and self-respect to move forward with your life positively — and in freedom.

Disconnection

There is a disconnection in my life. I'm apart from my family, but no one else did it but me. And now I can't take time back. I wish that I could, but now that I did what I did, I learned.

This is my first and last time on some real shhh. When I get out, I'm still going to be disconnected. I'm going to a group home in Petaluma. But I feel this is the best for me, even though I rather be home, and that's the best for me too, 'cause there's nothing wrong with my home,

When I graduate from my program, I get to be with my family and tell my lil' bra and sis that the halls is not where they want to be!

-Young Weezy U5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Learning from our experiences (both good and bad) is a way to kind of take time back. Even though you can't undo the past, if you learn from it, you can change the future. It's not enough to tell your little siblings that they don't want to be in this place. You have to SHOW them the right way to act by acting the right way yourself. Words are great, but action is everything. We see too many young people promising never to come back, only to see them here again. Don't be one of them!

Hair Today, Gone Tomorrow

Shhh! Another Tuesday and yet I wait to get sent to a program that might kick me out the fist few days I get there. It's that shhh about my hair again, 'cause they seriously cut people's hair at George Junior.

I have finally made a decision with myself: I'm not gonna cut my hair because it means too much to me. It represents too much for a group of people to simply cut it off like if it's some kind of unnecessary nuisance. I spend time to grow my hair; my hair has stories; it means something to me; it's an art within itself.

Example: my hair is starting to get split ends like hell, and a lot of people tell me to cut them off an inch or two so it can grow healthier, grow faster and look better. I was in my room one day thinking about it, and a thought just hit me. Cutting off split ends is like cutting anything else off. We cut off things just because they're not good enough.

Man, I gotta go, but maybe y'all get the point, I'll write next week, but in 2-3 weeks I'm out and my future waits.

-Meen U6, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Whether we would make the same decision as you regarding cutting our hair is not the point. The point is that you have taken a principled stand on something you believe very strongly about, and even knowing the possible consequences, you are willing to draw a line in the sand and say, "Beyond this point, you must not tread!" We admire principle and people who stand up for theirs, so admire you. We don't know if "they" can forcibly take your hair or not (which they did several years ago on death row), but even if they manage to do that, what they can't take is your principles. Hair grows back; principles do not. As long as you are willing to accept the consequences — and hurting no one — we say: Stand up for what you believe!

If Life Was a Stage...

If life was a stage, the part that I would play would be the counselor/therapy role. When it comes to my friends and family, or even people I don't know that well, I love to listen to whatever they have to say. Usually I can give very good support to others, but have difficulty when it comes to my own stuff.

Someday, I will become a counselor for teens especially, but primarily any ages in rehab/recovery. I feel like maybe I have a good powerful message to give. Hopefully someday, someone's life can be helped saved or changed (or all of the above) by the message I can give. Since the 4th grade my friends have told me that I should become a counselor because I'm easy to talk to. Well, in order to do all that, I will go to college at UCSC (University of California Santa Cruz) and get my masters. I promise myself that.

-Sara, Walden House PSK

From The Beat: Isn't it strange that most of us can offer support and advice for others whose problems we're not directly part of, but find it hard to deal with our own stuff. You put it very well. We have no doubt at all that you will make a terrific counselor. You may never know whose life you've affected for the better, but affect them you will. Stick to it, Sara. You're on your way!

Becoming A Success

My way out is to first quit messing with the people that got me in here, not go back to hanging out with the people I used to hang with. I think that if I wasn't out with the people that got me in here, I wouldn't be here in the first place.

Once I get out and get off of whatever they put me on, I'ma go back to the recording studio, make my own beats (so I won't have to wait on somebody else to do it for me), and start rapping again like I used to. Hopefully, with the rapping going on, I can find some sort of job. That way I can make sure I can stay out of the halls, get money the right way.

I'ma start going back to all my classes and get my grades up. That way I can keep a job and make sure I don't come back. It ain't coo' in the halls, being locked down like some caged animal at the zoo, having to scream out, "Can I get a head call?" when you gotta go to the bathroom. Most the time they won't even let you use the bathroom when you say it.

First few days in here you find yourself never wanting to come back; you find yourself missing everything you had.

-D'Mario U3, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Is this your first time getting locked up, D'Mario? If it is, it sounds like you've learned very quickly that it is not a place anyone wants to be — and more important, that you have it within your power to keep yourself free. The changes you plan are not easy to make — but then, as you've experienced, the consequences of not making those changes are not easy, either. We know you can follow through on these excellent goals of avoiding the homies that get you in trouble, getting back to serious rapping, getting a job and — most important of all — taking your education seriously. But we don't know if you will follow through. That can only be judged by your future actions and not your present words... "Never wanting to come back" is the beginning of wisdom. Don't let yourself down!

For My Young Family Members

My way out of this whole situation is to do as I know I should do. I mean there is no problem with help and a person there by your side to help you find things that make you happy and keep you out of trouble, not just with the law but with the street games and home and also school.

But there is no one to blame really but yourself. I mean you control your actions. No one is perfect, so they might let the wrong person help them out with something they know is wrong, but as everyone should deserve extra chances.

You gotta be aware of the people who take advantage of that and do worse. But my way out is to stay in school, stay on top of my work and dreams, and not let people bring me down — and to do what I think is right. Also I want to go to college and have everyone see me how they thought they would see me as a successful person.

I'ma stay out the streets but still keep in touch with people I'm coo' with, but only kick it with people I see trying to do something with themselves and leave behind this negative life. I'ma bring up a good one for me and my family because I got young family members that look up to me and I realize that what I show them will affect them, good and bad, in life. I have to learn and guide them on a right path along with myself, and make everyone who look down on me happy.

-John U6, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Well, John, it's clear that you know exactly what you have to do to move forward with your life — and why it's so important to do so (not just for you, but for those who look up to you). We admire everything you've said in this piece. Now you have to match your actions with your words. If you succeed in doing that, there are no limits to what you can achieve.

How The Hall Helped Me...

It helped me learn that you don't know what you have until it's gone.
It has helped me learn to have more respect for my parents.
It has helped me learn that this isn't the place where I wanna be, when I could be at home.
It has taught me that respect what you got in life.
It has taught me that I could be out of here if I didn't mess up.
It has taught me that what you should think about what you're gonna say, instead of just saying it.
It has taught me that I shouldn't have did what I did.

-Jacky U3, SF/YGC

From The Beat: These are all great lessons to learn, Jacky. The only question is how will what you have learned in here change how you act out there? Only you can answer that question.

Life Is Hard

When I look at myself I see the opposite of what my moms sees in me. She sees a person who is never going to make it in life and a person who likes to go out with a lot of guys. But she is wrong. I am a beautiful intelligent girl who likes to help young kids and be able to follow my dreams.

For me to be able to do that I have to feel positive about myself but I could not do that in the past because I always hear a lot of negative things about me which makes me think I am not worth anything and I cannot accomplish any of my goals.

Well from now on the negativity is going to stop because I know I am leaving 2006 and as I enter 2007 I am leaving the past in the past and start over because that is what I need to do is to move on and quick looking back on the negative stuff

It is time to show my mom that I am going to be successful without her help and I can make it through life without her saying something bad or negative about me or the situation. It's time that I woke up from the coma she put me through. Its over now because now I am starting to open my eyes and realize she is not what I need in my life anymore.

Now I am going to have a wonderful testimony when all of this is over. I cannot wait because now I want to do what I wanted to do and that is to be happy and praise God and live right by His rules. That is basically all I have to say about the situation. I hope now I can help another youth that is going through what I have been through.

-Jaquilla, Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: Wow it sounds like you really believe in yourself and that is the first part of succeeding. We are sorry you had a rough start with your mother. We hope you will surround yourself with positive influences and will finish school and realize you have the ability to achieve your goals. Thank you for the powerful and thoughtful writings!

The Freedom Path Vs The Criminal Path

My way of getting out of this situation is to learn a lesson right now. Compare the freedom path and the criminal path. What are the differences from the two ways of life? What are the challenges from them? How can you achieve them?

First, I could make a promise to myself not to come back here for the rest of my life. If I keep to that promise, I won't be having to deal with this criminal charges and bring trouble to my family.

Secondly I could start going to school, do all my homework, get good grades and get my diploma and move on with my life.

-Alvin U6, SF/YGC

From The Beat: What you've written seems so obvious to us that we're surprised more young people locked up don't see it as well. You've experienced (in a very minor way) where the criminal path leads, and you don't want to go there. That's the beginning of wisdom. You've looked at people and seen where their education takes them. That's the second step. The third is following through on the promise to yourself not to come back!

PIECES OF THE WEEK

Revelations

Another Tuesday, another Beat Within workshop. Another day that seems like the last, and I wait for tomorrow, which will seem like today. It's not that bad though, at least for me. I keep learning and discovering new things. Revelations!

I'm reading "The Four Agreements" by Don Miguel Ruiz. It talks about how we living in a dream because we live in a fog. Since the day we were born we were taught how to dream, what we should want and who we should be... and how we pay a thousand times for the same mistake because every time we make a simple mistake we judge ourselves for doing that and we blame ourselves for it. Maybe if we get beat up one time or somethin', now every time we think back on it we say, "Damn, I should've hit him harder; I should've never fought; I should've jumped him instead."

By doing this we bring unnecessary suffering on ourselves, and every time we are reminded of a mistake, we suffer all over again. As we grow up, we develop this "ideal" person we want to be, and we ignore our inner thoughts. We don't express the way we really feel because we're too scared to not be accepted.

We want to be loved and we want attention and we will do a lot to get it. We will even try to be somebody we're not, just so everyone else can accept us.

The book talks about a whole lot of other shhh, but y'all just gotta read that book if y'all really interested. Well, times up so I gotta go. Don't let this punk-ass system get to you. Take advantage of all this time we got. Time will never be wasted if we use it wisely.

-Meen U6, SF/YGC

From The Beat: This is a piece of the week as much because you are using your time to educate yourself, as well as for the particular message you write about here. We agree with what Mr. Ruiz has written, and we have seen first-hand just how much we're willing to "hide" in order to be accepted. It's a vicious circle. You don't seem to have much trouble expressing yourself, though, so we want to keep encouraging you to use your time by expanding your mind. By studying, you become a teacher. Go for it!

Change Is The Only Way Out

I think the only way out is to change your lifestyle. The way you can change your lifestyle is not by leaving your gang but your mentality on life and what you are doing to your life and future.

Another way out is to get your things together by getting a job and getting an education. If you get an education, you will be too busy to gangbang and all the other stuff.

There is one thing, when you are in the criminal justice system it's hard to get out of it, and the more wrong things you do, the longer you stay in jail. Once you start young, like most of us that get it form the old cats, by the time you know it, you been in jail your teen life, and when you do get out you don't know what to do but to be a drug dealer or a robber.

So I think you should be a leader and not follow, and think before you do. If you mess up once, it's all right, but if you mess up too many times, one of them it going to be the rest of your life in jail. So think before you do, and don't do before you think.

-Ali U7, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Getting an education is not only a way to stay too busy to gangbang, it is also a key that opens up doors to your future that you can't even imagine exist, until you start down that education path. You're certainly right that each time you go into the "criminal justice" system, you fall deeper and lower, making it all the harder to make it in freedom. So, you have a wonderful prescription here for a future life that will pay off huge dividends. But, like all prescriptions, unless you follow it to the end, it won't do you any good. Cut this piece out, tape it to your mirror, and read it every morning. You're on your way!

Not Worth My Freedom

Well, I think that jail made me think about my future more. Also about selling drugs. It's not really worth my freedom. I thought I was just going to keep getting away with it. I been hustling since I was barely a teen. I am seventeen now.

I just got caught. I never thought about my consequences till I was sitting in this little cell crying myself to sleep, and praying to God that I go home for Christmas.

But now I think I deserve to be here. I be getting away with murder my whole life, never listing to nobody. I could have been locked up, but God was trying to give me a chance but I never took it. Now I am here stuck when I could be at work and school. I took those things for granted and now it's to late.

-Athena U5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Of course it's not too late, Athena. In fact, what you've written here tells us that it's just the right time, not too early and not too late, for you to step into adulthood. You've been living as children live, without a thought to consequences. And now that those consequences have slapped you in the face, you're awake and becoming a young woman. Good for you! We don't know if you deserve to be here or not, but we do know that you deserve to give yourself the utmost respect, which means doing all that you can now to be all that you can be in the future. Good luck!

No Longer

You were my role model
You were my hero
You were anything but a zero
But I hated the way you reprimanded
That's one thing I could not stand
No matter how mom took a stand
I guess you had to prove you were a man

I was so small, I did not know
That what you did was wrong
But it did not last for long
Because soon you were gone
Up in Heaven, two months before I turned seven
You were my role model
You were my hero
But now I see you
Little more than a zero

(Dedicated to Robert Temmallo, my father...died 2000)

-Kyle SEF, Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: Your poem expresses very strong feelings about your father. When we are born, we don't have the luxury of picking our parents. If you could pick both your mother and father what kind of people would they be? Would they be the same parents you have now or would they be different versions of them?

PIECES OF THE WEEK

Life

You carry a knife 'cause you don't know how to talk
You carry a gun 'cause you don't trust your own shadow
You drink a beer to ease the pain
But at the end it's all the same
You were born with no name
But now you're known with lots of fame
You never knew your mom or dad
But no matter what you still are glad
Nothings nice, but nothings bad
Screw a Benz and screw a Rollie
Life is what you make it homie
You don't need to be rich with honey
Full of sweatness, full of love
Flyin' higher than a dove
Without any bud, no need for drugs
No need for guns
Live life full of love

-Brayan SEF, Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: Your message is great – Live life full of love. We think that sometimes we forget that we need to make the most of life by living each day that we are given spreading and receiving happiness and love. We're pretty sure that carrying and using guns, spending time getting high, being a part of threatening and violent activities isn't what life is supposed to be about. Why waste the days that we are given making a negative impact on society? As you so intelligently said, life should be full of sweetness and love.

Thinkin'

i'm sitting here thinkin' 'bout my life
thinkin' 'bout my family, thinkin' 'bout my wife
thinkin' 'bout all the things that began to happen
how i'm sittin' in this room, writin' and rappin'
thinkin' 'bout all the decisions i chose
how i hate it so bad when they say "line up in rows"
wearin' these county clothes
when will i get out, no one seems to know
thinkin' 'bout my people on the outs
used to be positive but now havin' them doubts
thinkin' all day, thoughts runnin' through my head
some nights wishin' i could just be dead
but then i'm thinkin' how my family would feel
thinkin' 'bout takin' that seven-year deal
but that means thinkin' 'bout tryin' to surrender
i could do better if i was my own public defender
thinkin', thinkin', i never seem to stop
my mind is as solid as a rock
thinkin' 'bout my childhood past
and how i wish i could have made it last
but that's the past, i got to move on
on my stressful days, i'm thinkin' how to stay calm
thinkin' 'bout how i can keep control
should i take a chance, like a dice roll
thinkin' 'bout the day everything went down
should i have walked straight or gone all the way around
thinkin', thinkin', more like reminiscin'
'bout my life right now that i keep missin'
hopin' someone will listen
i'm a star who's waitin' to glisten
thinkin' 'bout my real life, not something pretend
thinkin' 'bout my life in the end

-Big Vic, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Every poem you write gets sung by choirs of angels who make sure the population of heaven hears even while you remain a stranger to those earthly ears that you wish most might not only listen but understand, you deserve the chance to live your life as a free man. You've passed way beyond the errors of your past life, by which we don't mean any slip in your crime that got you caught up doing time, but the error of not using your mind to see through a life at which no one succeeds 'cause not getting caught doesn't make wrong, right, or feed your real needs — it just buries you deeper in a cage with no key, thinking you're living high and free, when you're still causing all others and yourself personal injury. But today, despite the constant pain, you finally understand, and facing better or worse, take your stand like an upright man.

Cold Is the Hate

cold is the hate
that tears apart our fate
it grasps deep within
to take our heart to sin
an emotion that's numb
that you can't even kill with a gun
deeper and deeper i go
more knowledge begins to flow
the equation is like a riddle
but filled with a juicy skittle
an iceberg in the bottom of a ship
it's the end of the trip
hop in and swim
it will be cold
as long as your blood keep' flowing
your heart will keep going
stroke after stroke
holding on for your life
trying not to choke
pulling me under with a grasping force
all out-of-control desire
and never a ending wire
no release, the pressure will only increase
trying to destroy me inside out
determination to take control
suffocatin' every breath
an oxygen machine sucking my lungs
out my body
not one by one
but two by two
pulling my intestine to
my stomach
my stomach to
my esophagus and out
my mouth
strain
by strain
fighting the pain
my heart is left to remain

-Jacob, 150 Crew

From The Beat: An allegorical tale representing the struggle to prevail or rather merely survive, to come out of the jaws of hate, the oceanic power of a cold-dooming fate to seize us from the inside out, twisting our life's breath into a testimonial of death, with only the heart's power to redeem itself from error or sin, that misguided desire within that gave hate its hook and shook the world on which we look until all is consumed with hate. How does the world end, with fire or ice? Have you ever read the short poem by Robert Frost, "Fire and Ice"?
Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To know that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.
Thanks for your poem, wherein cold hate seeks to suffocate our spirit's power to sustain a rhythm of breath preventing our own life's death; yes, it first begins in a heart of sin then spreads its paralyzing chill within — until a sinner's heart is born again!

cold is the hate
that tears apart our fate
it grasps deep within
to take our heart to sin

PIECES OF THE WEEK

Locked Up

i'm locked up, stuck
in the system
just another minority
trapped
in this white-man authority
everyday on my knees
asking god please
take me out this misery
steady reminiscin'
wishin'
i was free
and with my family
but in reality
they got me
in a correctional facility
watching time go by
wondering why
they rather see me in san quentin
doing life in prison
trying hard to stay focused
but sitting in this cell
got me feeling hopeless
what can i do
when i got nothing to lose
hoping god could provide better days
i ask myself if i can change my ways
but remain the same
addicted to putting in work
livin' life like
three strike'
never cross' my mind
at times i'm fed up
and wanna give up
but i gotta keep pushin'
like a souljah on a mission

-Baby G-Life, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Hopeless is a terrible place, but sometimes it's what it takes to break that addicted ego (false self that's bad for your own health) which holds you down and won't let go. Give up on that old life, 'cause it's a demon seized your mind, called addiction — it's a fiction, a lie, that would just as soon see you die as live 'cause there's nothing real it has to give. It fills you with a false sense of pride, that maybe used to guard that wound you carry deep inside, but as you see — in "protecting" you from reality, it's brought you to your knees. And that's a good thing, 'cause now you're praying. Have you ever heard the old saying: "Pray like it all depends on God, and act like it all depends on you." Why not choose to change? Like you say, what have you got left to lose, mayne? Nothing but your chains! Stay up, pray up, and start your way up out of this hell. We don't wanna see you live and die in prison, but it's your decision to make. Stop calling change weak or fake — it's the form answered prayer must take. (By the way, great poem, we have to say! Keep writing how you feel 'cause that's keeping it real.)

Only I Can

to unlock the door and be free
like cracking out of my shell and flying away
to wait for me is a better way
wiped clean of the mess
that puts us to the test
my vision is clear
it's just had a little smear
taking a saw to the shackles and cuffs
nothing can hold me down
my life belongs to me
and only i can set me free

-Jacob, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Beautiful poem and profound thought. You understand that freedom is more than escaping captivity, 'cause you need to know how to protect your freedom after your release. And in that sense, to be sure, only you can set you free from the revolving door that has so many detainees released and coming back for more tiny rooms and locked doors.

Santa's Role In My Life

Santa has always been a jolly let down. As a child I was told that there was a big fat white guy who was gonna come to me and my family, and if we were good, he would give us all presents. Each Christmas I would hope and pray it was true, but when I woke up I quickly realized that either he forgot about me or we were the worst family in the world 'cause he never came.

I was later informed that Santa wasn't ever gonna come, and if I ever wanted my siblings to enjoy a Christmas, it would be my responsibility to create the illusion of Santa and his presents. So, because my younger siblings had already heard the hopeful story of Santa, I decided not to let them down and just create a good illusion for them. I just didn't want them to continuously have the horrible let down that they previously had. My biggest hope was that they would realize that it wasn't their fault that Santa never came.

Santa was always a bad man in my mind. He was the worst iconic image bestowed upon young children in a state of poverty. How are people gonna tell my little brothers and sisters that this man is gonna break in our house and give them everything they want, knowin' they been good all year just to let their hopeful little hearts down or otherwise bestowing the responsibility of making their dreams come true on me, a kid myself.

-Brandi U5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We seldom see the level of sophisticated thinking — and writing — that you've pulled off in this remarkable piece of insight. You've given us an entirely new perspective on the subject by pointing out just how cruel such a fairytale can be in the minds of children for whom there will be no presents on Christmas morning. The fact that you, a child yourself, understood this and took it upon yourself to try to make it all right for your little siblings not only tells us that you have a first-class mind, but that you have a first-class heart as well. Each of those qualities can take you far in this world, but the combination makes us more than eager for you to get out of here and begin to move forward in a life whose potential knows no limits. We want to know more about your life, and the life you're hoping to achieve. You've already taught us something. Keep teaching!

Face In the Crowd

i'm just a face in the crowd
i try to blend in and not be so loud
but i'm more than what you'll expect
a young individual who'll always show respect
my uniqueness is always easy to detect
all my weaknesses are the things i regret
i stay quiet because i don't want to stand out
but sometimes i just need to shout
it feels like i got "criminal" tatt'd on my head
i want better adjectives to describe me instead
i'm a face with no name
"you ruin lives, you're the one to blame"
those are the words i hear in my sleep
i want to silence doubters, make 'em not say a peep
i feel like a single thread in a ball of yarn
if you see me in the streets, don't be alarmed
i won't cause no harm
i got personality, i might even charm
i'm not just a face in the crowd
and i wouldn't be even if it was allowed
but that all depends on my decision
i won't be a face in the crowd in prison

-Big Vic, 150 Crew

From The Beat: The nightmare of your situation provides the background for this declaration of independence from the criminal life that sentenced you to this high-risk tedium, as you wait in your cell day after day for a judicial decision — it's enough stress to break down the faculty of reason, but you face the fact that it was your past that committed treason betraying you to this institution from which there's no fleeing. And like a man you take your stand, refusing any further participation, mentally or physically, in justifying any future (God forbid) adult (the whole concept's an insult to civilization, your facing adult condemnation instead of juvenile rehabilitation) incarceration. You've turned the corner, and you're already walking a higher road, while the courts entertain the fiction that you're mind and heart are frozen like stone.

PIECES OF THE WEEK

I Want to Know Why. . .

Q: I want to know why people tell me they' gonna do something for me, but it never happen.
A: Because they always got to lie to me to make it seem like they gonna do it to make me feel better, but they can't tell me straight up and be honest. Instead they just lie.
Q: I want to know why I'm locked up and not with my family.
A: Because I grew up around a messed-up family, and they never gave me nothing. So I had to get what I wanted the hard way, and that way I ended up in jail, looking at twenty-five years behind bars, away from my family.
Q: I want to know why people always got to talk about me behind my back but not to my face.
A: Because they is scared to man up to a ninja. So instead, they have to talk about me to somebody else.
Q: I want to know why the courts is trying to throw the book at me and give me twenty years!
A: Because I chose to use drugs and let that take over my mind and did what I did. So now I'm looking at all that jail time.
Q: I want to know why my family can't be there to support me.
A: Because some of them would choose a ninja before they' own family members. But when I was out, it was a whole different story. But soon as I come to jail, they just forgot about me.
Q: I want to know why my life got to be this way.
A: Because as a young man, I grew up the hard way. For five years I was away from my family, getting raised by the State. And when they let me go back to my family, that's when everything started, because they could not get me stuff I wanted. So I felt like I had to go to the streets to get what I wanted, and all that.
Q: I want to know why my big sister never comes to see me but do stuff for the rest of the world.
A: Because she say she cares, but she don't really care. She would be quick to come up here if her ninja was here. She'd rather hang out with the young-ash girl' who can't do nothing for her, instead of taking two hours out of her day to be there for me.
Q: I want to know why people killing each other on the streets of Oakland.
A: Because people don't have what that person got. So he/she try to go out and rob that person. But he or she not giving it up, because they work too hard to get it — so they shoot and kill that person and take it. Or because they mad somebody out on the street gettin' that big money and they not! So they kill that person and think all that money gonna come to them.
Q: I want to know why when you on the out, people are all good with you, but when you come to jail, they forget about you.
A: It' like this — when you on the outs, you could do stuff for them and give the money, but when you in jail, you can't do nothing for them. So they just say, "Forget about what happened to him, because he can't do nothin' for me."
Q: I want to know why I can't get out and be with my loved ones.
A: Because I'm locked up and they won't let me out for twenty-five years!

-Lil' Man Man, 150 Crew

***From The Beat:** Oof! To those youngsters who read The Beat, they better believe what you say, but they grow up thinking it won't happen to them. If they really stop and think though, they'd realize they're on the same road, and if they don't take a right turn, they'll get left behind bars wondering why people on the outs seem to forget who they are, don't care where they are, and just the other side of these walls is a world that goes on without them. Instead they tell themselves, "I'll just pimp this little bit of time and get back out on the grind." And when they're out there, with money in their pockets for a minute, they forget about life behind bars just like everyone else does. Well, you say it all, but it's all so twisted and wrong. Part of it's the poisonous influence of putting money first, and part of it just "out of sight, out of mind" — though it's just the opposite for those locked up behind these walls. Thanks for the honesty. Don't give up on your family. Just keep writing them letters coming from your heart, with love not hate, and they'll remember where their hears are — maybe not all of them, or even the ones you expect, but family will eventually show up if you keep putting love ahead of everything else. Ask about their lives, and show you're concerned for them, even though you're facing all those years in the Pen'. Of course, it would have been better if you could have put first things first (love over money) before all the real trouble began, but don't underestimate the power of love to change your life and the hearts and lives of those to whom you write. Keep love alive!*

Locked Up Is Cold

what's cold is when you're locked up
on christmas, new year's eve and day
what's cold is when they tryin'a keep you
locked up for six months for a warrant
what's cold is when you look at six months
and see what you missed, which would be
valentine's day, your kid's birthday,
your dad's birthday, easter, your birthday,
your brother's birthday, the day your brother passed
away,
your sister's birthday, your two best friends'
birthdays
and your mom's birthday for a second time
what's cold is how the 'hood you live in
will eat you up and spit you back out
what's cold is when you get beat by the men you love
what's cold is that all the stuff i just named isn't
even the beginning
post script: life is just cold and that's what's up!

-Sunshine, 150 Crew

***From The Beat:** Not much sunshine in this dark and painful poem! Somehow, some way, you've got to find out how to overcome your 'hood and all those temptations and snares that do you no good. For one thing, if a man beats you, it's a bad love and you've got to get out of it faster than fast; in fact, get out at just the threat of it 'cause it is not okay — he (they) need to learn that, but you can't wait till he (they) do. It is also messed up to be doing all this time behind a warrant (for a missed court date?), but when you're released just make sure you get no more warrants. Life is hard, life is demanding, but it doesn't have to be cold. Work hard at coming in out of the cold. Do what you need to do to get out of the cycle of feeling abused, misused and confused — even if you do it all alone.*

Disconnection

Unfortunately, the people who have always been there, and willing to help and support me – my family – I have pushed away, in the past, and recently. I've always felt that they weren't there, never had been, and wouldn't be able to understand, whether I told them truthfully or, not. Although I made a very good effort to stay clean, not just for me, but for my family. They agree with my efforts. They're still here, in full force, working hard to find the best program for me – not only to be sober, but to help me get out of here and find a better way to go on with my life and career. I'm thankful.

Coming into here, juvy, I have people I prefer to talk to more than others, and people I feel more comfortable talking to, like they're actually listening to me, trying to hear me and get to know me personally, and trying to help me. It's somewhat frustrating to have an outsider just step in and tell you what's wrong and what you're going through, and what not. It either supports that feeling of not wanting to hear anything at all, or kind of makes me think "is this what these people really see of me?" This isn't what they should know or see. This isn't the real me at all.

In all actuality, they're here to help. I'm here to let them, as well. It's sometimes good for an outsider to see you from their perspective. They don't relate to you personally, but only from what they've seen. I do want and prefer the help from my family more, though. It helps to be warm and comfy and to see their faces while working up those stairs through the struggle to a sober life.

-Christina, Santa Cruz

***From The Beat:** Sounds like, after looking at the range and quality of those whose mission it is to help you that you've learned to appreciate everyone's effort, even if, in the end, you prefer the help to come from your family. Which is to say, it sounds like you're willing to take real help, wherever it comes from. Which, we believe, is good.*

CO-PIECES OF THE WEEK

College Degree, Then My Own Business

My way out, in life, is going to college and getting my degree, so I can get my own business. If I can get my own business, I will not have to struggle in life — and I will not be seen as a menace to society, as young black males are all-too-quickly labeled by upper-class people and the police (who work for them).

When I have achieved this goal, I also plan to teach young kids to stay out of trouble so that they won't be the target of the system. I will tell the youngsters about my life, because my life has been hard! I've seen a lot of things in my life that shouldn't happen to anyone. I saw my mother get killed, right in front of my face. And when I saw that, I thought I was going to lose my life, too.

I've spent eight months in this maximum security unit, fighting my case and fighting for my freedom. If all goes well, I am going home to my wifey and her family to begin a new life — aka my way out of the criminal justice system. I am determined to have a better and more meaningful life. Peace out, Beat! This yo' boy, Lil' Sam. God bless!

-Lil' Sam, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You don't have to wait to teach and inspire youngsters with your story because you're doing it right here in this piece, and any youngster with eyes to see will recognize the courage and strength you show simply in setting these goals for yourself and setting on the road to achieve them. And they will be inspired by your fighting for your freedom, refusing to cut a deal with the system that supposedly saves you stress and strain, and choosing to stay in max' serving this "dead time" as you fight to prove your innocence and reclaim your freedom — vowing never again to put it at risk through bad decisions, which is to say, the choices you made day by day in the life you were living. You're already a role model. Thanks, Sam. We know on your road to success, you'll go full throttle!

A Solution Out

In order for a person to escape the life that is considered a criminal or "street life," would either be for the government to produce more high-paying jobs, create laws that do not allow employers to ask about criminal history, lower rent that some landlords selfishly raise more for a profit than in considering the lives of people and their children, reverse the effects of a government promoted drug - cocaine - and also provide more programs that help youth with criminal history get jobs at reasonable pay, even if it is to support them on emancipated bases.

Although the effects cocaine has had on our communities, and especially our government system are extremely harsh, its effects are so devastating it can hardly be reversed. But our community is what's gonna produce our ideas, or at least influence them.

-Angel Means, 150 Crew

From The Beat: What your talking about is grassroots action, or bottom up. This is an idea that is so important for a community if it's going to improve the way of life for its members. It's also something that not a lot of people understand, especially if they are being held back by poverty, violence, substance abuse and poor education. If you understand these things, and it seems you do, it is your duty to your community, your friends, your family and everyone you love to get involved, be positive,, support youngsters that are heading in the wrong direction. What community activist groups are at work in your neighborhood? What can you do to get involved, be positive, change things for the better and really affect not just your own life, but the lives of others. We know how intelligent you are, but many fine minds have been wasted by lost opportunity. Don't lose yours!

also provide more programs that help youth with criminal history get jobs at reasonable pay

The Worst Call

[RM = Rhonda's Mom; J = Joslyn]
J: Hello. Oh, what it do, Moms?
RM: Hi. How you doin' Crazy J?
J: Fine. What's up? You sound like you been cryin'.
RM: I have. Uh ... I don't know how to say this. Uh ...
J: What's wrong? What happened? Where Rhonda at?
RM: She ... ummmmm ... gone home ... you know?
J: Stop playin'! What you mean? She sleep?
RM: (Sobs.) No! She passed this morning at three thirty ...
J: Go wake her up! Stop playin'!
RM: I'm not. She's gone.
J: (Crying.) How it happen? So you say she just said bye or something.
RM: No. Her heart failed before they got to her. When we got there it was like one thirty.
J: (Sobs.) Dammit! Man! What the ... (crying) My best friend, man ...
RM: Look, come over at three. We gon' keep her room the way it is. But we need to talk, plan out this.
J: (Sobs.) Okay. I'm gonna be there in a minute, 'kay? Hang tough. Love you.
RM: Love you, too, baby. And she said she gon' miss you.
J: Okay ... (click).
RM: Okay ... (click).

-County Snack, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Oh Lord, what a terrible call to get, but thank God that you were there for her mother to hold onto, and vice versa. Pain shared is pain lessened, or so they say. In such times, we must be grateful for small blessings and honor the love that goes on living in our hearts and be there for one another. Thank you for sharing this sad, sad story.

Lil' Man Man: My Life

I'm just sitting in my cell, just thinking about life and what's gonna happen to me when I get out of jail after I do my time.

It is so many things that I ask myself all the time, and I just can't never think to myself because I got hella stuff on my mind — thinking about who gonna be there for me when I'm doing that twenty-five bid in the Pen'. But this how I see it. The first year, it's gong to be your moms, sis', cous', girl, and some friends. Second year: moms, sis', cous', girl. Third year: sis', girl. That's how I be feeling all the time about some of my family.

But when I touch down and do something with my life on the out and get rich, them same people gonna be coming to me askin' me to do things for them. I'm just gonna say, "Where was you when I was doing that twenty-five bid?" And they just going to sit there and look stupid.

-Lil' Man Man, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We understand both your fears of being forgotten in that time you'll serve, a longer time that you've walked the earth. Shouldn't there be a law making it impossible to be sentenced to do more time than you've lived on earth? It didn't take you that many years to get your mind twisted into doing what you did, and it shouldn't take anymore years to get your mind straight. But anyway, as for those on the outs you care about: Don't surrender to the bitterness in your heart. Fight to keep hope and love alive. Write them! Ask about their lives. You'd be surprised how much good you can do for people even from lockdown if you come from a clear-thinking and compassionate place. In other words, don't shut down. Keep giving love, and you won't even have to worry about getting love in return. In fact, don't give to get — that's that money-driven way of life, and that's your deepest enemy now. Use your time to become wise. See the world with new eyes. You'll be amazed! And you'll amaze others, day by day. Let your inner power blaze! And don't forget to write the readers of The Beat, 'cause hearing from you is what they'll need most, whether they know it or not.

CO-PIECES OF THE WEEK

I'm Ready

this is my blessing and it's up to me to get it right
i'm not living for me anymore
it's time for me to take care of another life
grow up and pray to god my mistake doesn't happen twice
mistaken and in love but i gotta remember
i cannot change you into what i want you to be
if we were together we would make the perfect three
but life goes on and by choice i choose it to be better for me
and my family legend plus more to come
will be known for pride, respect, and dignity
since i messed up it's all on me
i'll sit back and watch him
take care of my business and make sure to stay single
because i have to get my mind right, the way it used to be
i don't have time to smoke, kick it, and mingle
now what he does is all on him
i got love and he got me just by this baby
but please believe i'm me, so he gotta come correct
don't have time to sit around and let that make me
school, i'm always good at
love, i've always given
life, i've always lived to the fullest
hanging out is being put to an end
when you have responsibilities, they need to be taken care of
"i wish i would have listened"
and that's been said from my generation and above
but this is my chance to get it right
and this time i feel my mind is right and i'm ready

-Ariyca, 150 Crew

From The Beat: If well-reasoned thought, mature understanding, articulate speech, good intentions, self-respect, and the power of love, all lined up together as they are in the poem above, could guarantee success — your success would be guaranteed. In truth, it is a success already a great success to have gotten your mind right and yourself ready, even if there is still the task of being that good mother to your baby day in and day out. Also in your unit we all talked about what a slippery place school can be, surrounded by your peers many of whom are not taking life as seriously as you will be (thinking they don't need to, they're just kids, or whatever) — so make sure "living life to the fullest" means taking advantage of this chance to get your life right and be there for your baby day and night (even when you're not with your baby, you there for your baby when you're thinking and acting right). As for the father, yeah, he needs to come correct. Maybe he'll learn from your example.

Change

Well, at first when my social worker was trying to help me change my life, I wasn't about it. But after awhile, and after using and messing around a lot and screwing up my life, and my emotional and mental self, I realized that maybe I do need to make a change. So I started taking under consideration that my social worker is trying to help me. Now I'm trying hard to listen, and to do good so I can grow up and become successful in life.

-Megan, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: Good. No way to know how long it takes to wake up. But if you're working hard at making those changes, or even seriously considering how to make those changes, you are on the right path. It must feel good to be headed in the right direction.

Antes De Venir A Los EEUU

Bueno mi nombre es Elvin. Yo les voy a contar algo de mi vida que he vivido en mi pais y he visto. En mi pais, era diferente. Yo no andaba en malos pasos.

Vine de mi pais para encontrar unas malas personas que me ensuciaron la mente y me dieron drogas. Asi fue como yo pude visitar la juvenile unas veces.

Mi vida va a cambiar el dia que yo salga de aqui. Yo voy a cambiar y voy a agarrar buenos caminos. Voy a visitar a la escuela, no me voy a caer del programa como anteriormente. Lo voy a hacer por mi mismo, por mi madre y mi familia para no darles mas dolores de cabeza. Esta es una parte de mi vida que yo he vivido aqui en este pais, EEUU. Yo voy a cambiar y me voy a portar bien. Me gustari¬a que leyeran esta carta y el Senor las ponga.

Gracias por venirnos a visitarnos y pasen un prospero ano nuevo, ya que yo no lo voy a poder estar afuera con mi familia y amigos.

From The Beat: Lo mejor para ti seri¬a buscar como alejarte de esas malas compani¬as que te llebaron muchas cosas malas. Deberi¬as de juntarte con gente que tengan diferente tipos de pensamientos y diferente formas de actuar. Si te llegan a dar una oportunidad de salir y alejarte en este lugar, no desaproveches esta oportunidad. Vayas donde vayas, siempre tendras la oportunidad de ser alguien en la vida, pero para eso tienes que alejarte de las drogas y de las malas compani¬as.

Before Coming To The USA

All right then, my name is Elvin. I'm going to share with y'all something about the life that I lived in my country and about what I saw. In my country, it was different. I was not into doing bad things.

My life is going to change the day that I get out of here. I am going to change and I am going to grab and follow good paths. I am going to visit school and I am not going to fail from my program like I did before. I am going to do it for myself, for my mother, and for my family so I don't give them anymore headaches. This is one part of my life that I have lived in this country, USA. I am going to change and I am going to behave myself. I would like for them to read this letter and may the Lord put it in their hands.

Thank you for coming to visit us and may y'all have a prosperous New Year since I won't be able to be on the outs with my family and friends.

-Elvin B1, SF/YGC

From The Beat: The best thing for you would be to find the way to distance yourself from the bad company that brought with them many bad things. You should get together with people that have different kinds of thoughts and different ways of acting. If they end up giving you another opportunity to be on the outs and distance yourself from this place, don't let that opportunity go to waste. Regardless of where this life may take you, you'll always have the opportunity to be someone in life, but in order for that to take place, you have to distance yourself from drugs and from those bad influences that have nothing positive to offer you.

Prostitution

most people say "prostitution is the solution"
i think prostitution is a way to get yo' life ruined
'cause hoes be out in the rain, even when it's fifty degrees
i also think that because some hoes got potential to succeed
not to stand on a track wearin' horse weave and smoking weed
and end up going to the bathroom to go "pee"
jus' to find they got three STD's ("sexually transmitted diseases"; infections)
or even the worst: HIV ("human immune-deficiency virus")
i also think that way because that's the worst way
for a female to treat her body
but if you look at it again
it be they choice, so i can't say too much

-County Snack, 150 Crew

From The Beat: No, it's because it's their "choice" that they need to make the right choice, and not be used by some pimp's persuasive voice or even brutal force — it's not about judging these girls but helping them see their way through to changing their world by changing their choice, using their own voice to say, "No," to that bozo making dough off her body. We've seen so many girls come to their senses in here, off drugs and away from the one they used to call "dear" or whatever. Say your say, 'cause you're just trying to free a slave from volunteering to live in chains. Everyone one of these girls can succeed with a little help from the rest of us in this cold, cruel world. Thanks!

CO-PIECES OF THE WEEK

How Has The Hall's Helped

Being in the halls helped me by giving me time to think. Being in here makes you appreciate things like that when you out on the street you don't even care about nothin'. You just live like you ready to whatever. Then when you get locked up, you think about everything. Just the little things like just going to school even when you don't go to class just to see the girls.

Man, just ta go to the bathroom on your own without askin'... that shhh hurt. Just to see or talk to your family you miss, to yo' girl on the phone instead of a letter. You wish you just had the freedom you threw away.

But period point blank, being in here just gives you time to reflect on your life and gives you time to make life decisions. So that answers the question... being in the halls does have some good in it after all.

-Marvin U4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We often read complaints that the system is building more jails than schools, but if you go to school without going to class (or, if you don't go to school at all), then why build schools? Jail does not have to be a place where you have to be to figure things out, you can do that from home on your own time. It's obvious that you know exactly what you need to do to overcome your situation, so now all you have to do is apply all this knowledge to your life, and leave the rest up to time. We're not saying that will be easy. We're just saying it is a necessity!

The Halls Helped

Well, it did because back then when I'm on the streets, I really be doing a lot of bad stuff and didn't really give a shhh. But after I been in here, it really told me to never come back in here again.

It also got me going to school again and learning even though I'm planning to take my GED. But if I had a chance, I would rather stay in school and get my diploma. But this place really helped me a lot. I'm a lot smarter now about doing things and for sure after I'm out, I am not coming back. That's a promise to myself.

-Soda U7, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We sure want you to keep that promise to yourself. What's your plan for doing it? You know what got you here, which is another way of saying you know what you have to stop doing in order to stay out of here. Will your knowledge be enough to keep you out? Time will tell.

Last Time

the last time i felt wanted
i actually felt haunted
it was by the devil
he tried to make me sink to his level
i declined, he pulled
thought he had me fooled
feel right into his traps
like a drug addict, had a relapse
wanted by the evil spirit
kept talkin' but i didn't want to hear it
it was a struggle to get away
broke away, but the devil was there to stay
he wanted me, but i didn't want him
had jesus by my side, so i could not sin
i am determined to win
maybe not for me but for my kin

-Big Vic, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You have already won, but relapse for a moment every time the devil has you thinking, "If only I'd gotten away with the crime." The greatest temptation is to believe that the sin was in getting caught, 'cause that's the lesson the devil has always taught. But when you can face the consequences without seeking cover behind the devil's fences, you've returned to your senses — and with Jesus by your side — claimed freedom within. Now your prayers fly to heaven free from the burden of sin.

The Halls Helped Me To Think

I can say that the halls helped me to think more about what I really want to do with my life. I been balancing a lot of things out while being locked up. Like Jack from Omega told me, either you gone be a thug to the bone or you not. Ever since he told me that, it really been on my mind. The way I feel right now makes me wanna change, but it's hard. But it's a way out of everything, you just have to find the way.

To me, I don't think thugs live long, and that's the road that I'm on. So I really need to work on that because I'm trying to live and have a family one day. I'm not living for the block; I'm living for Lloyd.

-Lgb U4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Jack shared this wisdom with you because it is real. You're right, making changes is hard for all of us. But, Lloyd, the consequences for not making the changes you need to make are also hard, including being here (which is a lot easier than what's waiting down the line). So, the hard choices you have are change or face similar results. Which is harder?

The Halls Are Like Hell

Being in the halls for this long has taught me a lot. Mostly the things that I've learned are negative. But I gotta admit that there are also some positive things I've learned in here. I've learned that committing crimes — there's a punishment to it. I've learned that in here is like hell. So don't commit any more crimes to come in here. I've learned a lot from that program Omega that happens every Wednesday. So I think that if the judge gave me another chance, I would really improve out there in the streets.

-Ramon U3, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You will get out, Ramon, and that's when you'll face your real challenge. You'll have to answer to yourself — whether whatever you do on the outs is worth risking your freedom. Has Omega given you an idea of what you plan to do differently when you walk out of here — hopefully for the last time?

Keeping Busy — My Way Out

My plan to get out of the system is going to school and staying out of trouble. Also, do what the judge and my PO tells me to do to get out of the system. Listen to my mom and my relatives around me. Get a job and keep it, and play sports for high school so I will be busy, so I won't get into trouble. That's my plan to stay out of the system.

-Dr U3, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You've obviously thought your plan out very well, DR, because it's a very good one. Why haven't you followed this plan up to now? What has made you change how you've been doing things? Is it being locked up, or have you just started to grow up and see things in a new way?

The Halls

The halls has helped me think about many things and many of my problems. It also makes me stay out of trouble. Maybe if it wasn't for the hall I probably could've got into more trouble.

Also the hall ain't the place to be, and it actually make you think hard of what you did. It also make you think of how many people you hurt, like your family and your loved ones. I regret for what I did for my mistake, and when I get out I am going to make a huge change in my life, cousin.

-Kwes U6, SF/YGC

From The Beat: It puts a big smile on our face when we read that someone in this place has used their time to focus on themselves and what they have to change, instead of on the system and what it has to change. You can only change yourself, so we're excited by your determination to do just that, and we're sure the payoff will be worth the effort. Yes, it will take effort, but everything worth having is worth working for. We're behind you 100%. Could you give us a hint of some of the changes you anticipate making?

CO-PIECES OF THE WEEK

What My Dream Taught Me

I had this one dream where I was at my grandparents' house and there was this lion in a cage, and for some reason I was the only one who can let him out. So I let him out, and he started killing everybody. Then I realized, since I can let him out, I can put him in, so I tried to put him in and succeeded. What I learned was that the lion was my anger and I was the only one who can control him.

-Anthony U3, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Dreams are strange things, Anthony, but it seems like yours was speaking directly to you — and that you heard what your dream was trying to tell you. In the Frankenstein story, Frankenstein is not the monster but the monster's creator. You have recognized that you are the creator of your own anger, and therefore, you are the only one who can tame it. Great insight! So, what do you plan to do to put that lion back in its cage?

Better Self Control

The halls has helped me control myself better, because in here I have time to think. Whenever I'm in my room, I think about the opportunities and privileges I had.

I been inside here since Sept. 23. Today is Dec. 12. Hopefully when I go to court on Friday, I get released. I made myself a plan on what I'm going to when I get out, so I'm not going to go and make stupid mistakes. Bein' locked up made me cherish being free. It helped me wake up.

So if you get arrested, make sure you leave with a plan, otherwise you will be back

-Up Top U7, SF/YGC

From The Beat: It sounds like you've learned what you needed to learn from this unfortunate experience. Could you share some of the details of your plan for success with Beat readers?

My New Game Plan

Well, my way out is to attend to my baby, go to school, and go to church. I think that's the best way to avoid going, or coming back to jail.

Another way of preventing going or coming to jail is getting a job, or finding something to keep me occupied.

-Christine U5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Being a mother to your baby is going to be a full-time job. You really won't need anything else to "keep you occupied..." If you can handle that and go to school and to church, we think your future is going to be a lot brighter than your past. This is an excellent plan, and we hope you stick to it. Good luck!

Cold World

What's cold, is that we choose to go down this road
We choose to live that life, every day's an episode
The cars, the clothes, the gold — that's what we choose to cherish
It's really just a game, when you lose you perish
Or it's back on lock down, behind those four walls
Headed for the pen, but it began in the halls, uh oh
You getting older now yo' charges getting bolder now
The world is getting colder now
Moms strung out and it's breaking your heart
You wanna do right, but you don't know where to start
Should I hustle? Should I wait? You can't make a decision
It's a cold world, but you could make it, just listen

-Ro U7, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Except for one line, we agree with every word in this tight little poem. That line we don't agree with is that one that says, "you don't know where to start." We think you do. "Just listen" to what you are telling yourself: Start where you are, which means, start making the choices you know lead to a better future and stop making the choices you know lead to this hole. Great words, RB. Now, can we expect great actions to follow? Time will tell.

What Is Your Way Out?

My way out, you feel me, is to stop clicking with your boy and start hitting them books. You know a way to stop hustle is going to school and get a job. That will always keep you away from gang banging, the street life, and also from the criminal justice system. I regret not doing it.

-Notorious Mk U4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We couldn't have put it any better than this, MK. But, of course, this is easier said than done. How will you assure yourself to follow your own excellent advice when you get out of here?

Bein' locked up made me cherish being free. It helped me wake up.

Freedom

Freedom
What is freedom?
Are we truly free?
As that of the untamed sea?
Or is it all dreams and mentality?
Are we free to reach for the sky
before our mind and body die?
Or are we slaves
to those things that our mind craves?
My thoughts are tainted
as if my mind's been painted
All I see is the dark
As if night has left it's permanent mark

-Andrew SEF, Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: Excellent writing! Great question posed – What is freedom? We believe that our minds are always free. No matter what is going on around us or who is controlling us, our minds and mentality can never be enslaved. At any given time, we can choose how to speak, how to react, how to behave, or how to be. No one, nor anything, can control or enslave our internal spirit. This my friends, is freedom. We are free as the untamed sea...

Why?

Why are kids having kids when some can't even take care of themselves?
Why do kids join gangs when the only thing they're trying to do is run away from their problems?
Why don't kids go to school; just because they think they're cool?
Why don't kids have faith in themselves; all they want to do is live life on their own terms.
Why do kids do drugs; is it because they have nothing else to turn to but the pipe and needle?
Why, why, why? It's all a mystery.

-Big-D, Donshay SEF, Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: "Why"..... Such a powerful, yet frustrating word. Your piece presents so many perplexing questions. We wonder what answers other people would have to such questions?

CO-PIECES OF THE WEEK

Trying To Change

Me I've been in the game for a few years now. I consider myself a bonifide hustler because I can make a dollar out of fifteen cents. But really that's not the life to live. It's not all what it seems. I stay in and out of juvenile halls. I never get charged for a serious charge, but I stay in and out of the halls and group homes.

In the streets I get harassed by the cops and jacked on a regular basis. I almost got killed and I almost killed another person. I go home and my mom don't want me, but I'm in that mode where I don't give damn. I just finished a group home not that long ago and I'm getting sent to another one.

Basically, I plan on getting my shhh together. To me my life is going by too fast, and I feel I haven't did enough positive things. I chose this life and I pretty much made my mind up, but as long as this is what I going to do I'm going to try my hardest to live a positive life. All I'm saying is these street lives ain't all what the seem.

-Slim Looney U4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: In truth, SL, you're hustling for the system. You've put much more money in the pockets of the guards' union than you've ever put in your own! And that will continue as long as you keep putting yourself behind these walls. That "I don't give a damn" mode you describe is another way of saying, "I'm still a child." It's only when we get to that final paragraph that we see you are moving out of childhood and into the reality of responsible adulthood. That's all to the good, and we applaud you and encourage you to keep that in mind as you move from here back into freedom. It is not easy to live a positive lifestyle, especially when all you know is the hustle. But, as you have clearly experienced, it's also not easy living the life of a hustler. The child thinks only of himself and his immediate gratification. The adult thinks of others and what he must do now for later gratification. Keep moving in that adult direction, and your future will be so much better than your past. Good luck!

Juvenile

Being in juvenile has been very helpful to me, because when I was on the outs, I was into a lot of negative things going on around me and into the 'hood. At the time I was so blacked out from everything, not listening to moms, family members, and everybody that was helping me out.

At times I was doing things that people never thought I would do, just 'hood out with it, straight gangsta. Moms used to tell me if I don't stop what I was doing, I was going to end up dead or in jail for life, but I don't listen.

But thankfully, I was brought to jail, where I had the time to think of what I was doing, and getting to know who I really am. Being in here has really opened my mind to be knowing what I really want to do in life.

-J-Pitt U6, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Very few people who come here have the maturity — or the honesty — to admit that they benefited from being forced to be alone with themselves. We admire you for opening up your soul, not just to yourself but to The Beat. Now that you've examined your life and yourself, what have you found the "real you" to be like, and what do you "really want to do in life?" As for not listening to your moms, we all go through that. Before we recognize just how much moms knows — and how dedicated she is to protecting us — we have to do our own growing up. It looks to us like you've done just that!

A Plan For Staying Free

When I get out, I'm going to go to school and get my high school diploma. I'm thinking of being a construction worker.

I don't want to be back in juvy. I want my little brother to be better than me in life. I want to be with my family for Christmas. I don't want to be here, period.

-Emiliano U3, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Good for you, Emiliano. It seems like this bucket of cold water in the face has made you open your eyes and wake up! You can be the teacher your little brother needs to keep himself free and moving forward, but you can't teach him with good words. Only with good deeds. He will follow what he sees you doing, so do it!

My Feelings About The Hall

Let me tell you so far how I feel about being in the hall. I been kind of going through it 'cause it's hard to be in here and not have your freedom. But it give you time to think about what you have to do when you get out of this place. It make yo' mind stronger and tell you about the things you did was wrong and you need to stop messin' up. You need to keep yo' cool and get new friends that can help you go somewhere, and keep them by your side at all time.

So being in the halls is bad, but just take this time to think and release all your bad habits that got you in here stuck in a 10 by 8 box, and you will be out soon — sooner then you think.

-Lil' Mmo U6, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We definitely admire the advice you give in this piece, but we wonder how difficult it is to follow. When you think about what you've done to put yourself in that box, what different decisions do you plan to make when you get out? You surely knew, before you came here, that some of the things you were doing were wrong, so how will what you've learned here change that? Yes, you will get out, some sooner than others. But that's when your advice can make the difference between staying out and falling back into the hole. We hope you read your own words over and over, and take them to heart.

Deaf in My Eyes

I can't sleep at night
Because all I see is the deaf in my eyes
I can't even walk outside
Because all I see is the deaf in my eyes
I can't even go for a ride
Because all I see is the deaf in my eyes
I can't even have my girl by my side
Because all I see is the deaf in my eyes
Now as I'm livin' life
I no longer see the deaf in my eyes

-Big-D, Donshay SEF, Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: WOW! What a unique piece of writing. We love how you expressed your feelings using and mixing two senses – sight and sound. Very intriguing! We pose a challenge to the readers of this poem – what does the author mean by saying "All I see is deaf I my eyes"?

White Lines

Come form coco leaves Colombian trees chimacle made
Exported, the best sell it in bricks, cut it with blades
Make money by tens
Solid, then reduce it to powder, cook it, flip it to rocks
Got the nation on the hype
Let's get back on line
Drop it on the table, form 'em with the credit card
Bring out the straw, put it in your system
Now numb your gums
Don't go crazy pulling out guns
Got yo moms hooked on them lines
Buying 'em form the corner boys
No money now, selling your toys
Yep, she got it, she's feeling that joy
She unemployed... look at her now
Selling herself fo' more, lookin' fo' shelta
Sorry, I can't help 'er
She tryna sell herself for a doub
She crying looking at my bug home
Asking herself how could she be so dumb

-Lil' Lazy U7, SF/YGC

From The Beat: What seems so appealing in the beginning leads to such devastation in the end. This is a great description of how cocaine feels like it's taking you up, while all the time it takes you down and down and down. We hope everyone who does this deadly drug reads your words. And we hope even more that everyone who sells it sees what they are doing to someone's mother, daughter, sister, brother. If you are using or selling, then you've written some pretty words, but pretty words don't count. It's only pretty deeds that matter.

Twenty-Five Years Or Let You Go

If you come in here for a murder and they offer you twenty-five years or they drop the murder charge and let you go but said if you ever come to jail for anything, they going give you life without parole and charge you with the murder you committed — what you going do?

Are you going back to your old way, standing on the corner selling drugs? Or are you going to consider going down the right path and doing something with your life and getting a good job so you won't have to go back to your old ways! Would you take twenty-five years or take the get-out-of-jail-free card?

-Lil' Man Man, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You got it right, 'cause when you go back out on the street for whatever reason, and you know you've done crimes you never got charged with or found guilty, it's God's grace. And you can take that grace and go back to the same old till you wear it out and get that twenty-five year sentence, or you can choose the right path and make God's blessing last. True that!

To the Young G First-Timer

You youngsters better wake up and start doing what you got to do and show the courts that you can be on the street and go to school and do something with your life.

Just look at it this way: They send you to group home, EM (electric monitor), and all that other stuff because they know you' going to keep running or come up in here for a charge that' going to get you put in jail for the rest of your life — and I know you don't want that! Do you? Ask yourself if you want to be in jail for the rest of your life or you want to do something with your life?

It is thing' out there to do instead of going out there robbing and selling drugs to get money. This how the game go: It one way in and no way out, because you going end up getting killed or in somebody' jail where you would be lucky to get out.

Well you could, if this is your first time here, make it your last — and pimp whatever they send or put you on. Because all this mess going to be here when you get out. Ain't nothing going change! So take what I said in consideration and change your life around.

-Lil' Man Man, 150 Crew

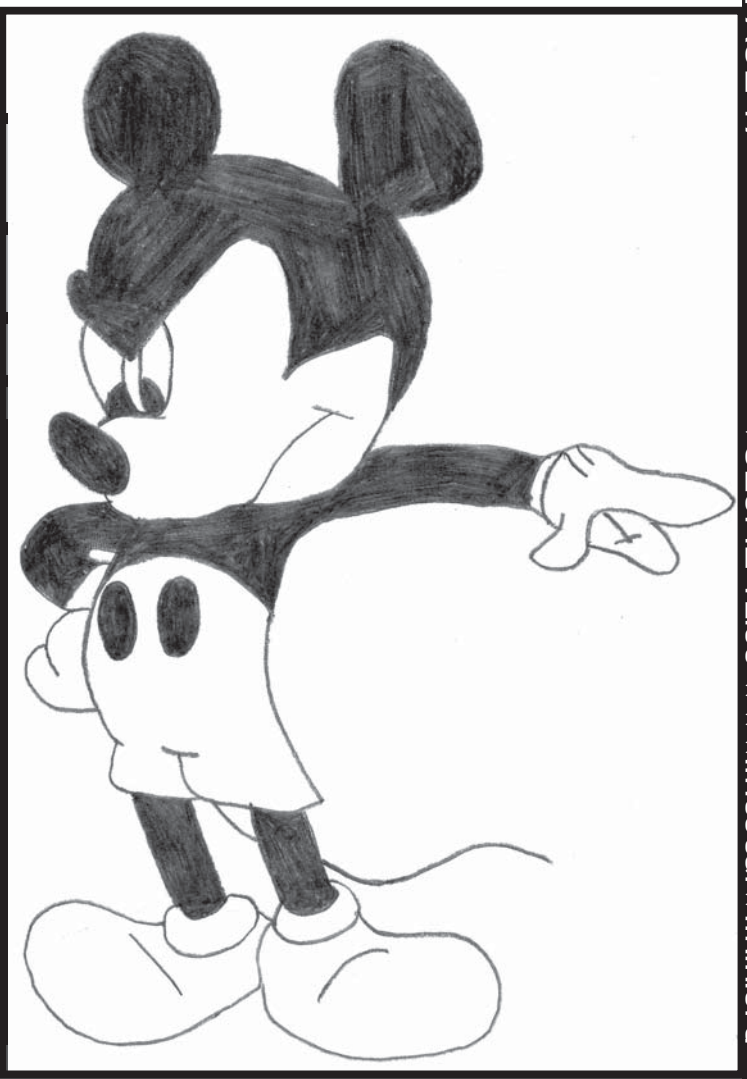
From The Beat: Tell it like it is! Teach, Lil' Man Man. 'Cause your first time in, for sure is you best chance never to come back — if you change what you're doing on the outs. First timers do have the best chance, but second timers can change, too. Sometimes it takes several times before a hardhead can figure out that it's not just changing up how you do your dirt, it's quitting the game, going to school and getting legal work for your pay, like a weekend job or after school. Okay? We hope readers listen to what you have to say. Thanks Lil' Man Man.

My Time Is Coming to an End

My time is coming to an end in juvenile hall, because I'm about to turn eighteen years old on the second of February, and they're going to send me to Santa Rita to fight my case from there. I'm off to the Pen' to start my time.

-Lil' Man Man, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Santa Rita is still just a county jail and should be better than the Pen'. And you're still fighting your case, so maybe you'll never get to the Pen'. Whatever happens and wherever you go, stay strong and keep writing readers of The Beat, 'cause you never know how many minds you might still reach — either to change while they still can or to learn what lies ahead. Maybe a few will want to write to you, and in jail there's not much better than getting a letter.



RIP Larry L. Z. Goitre, My Beloved Grandfather

What's up with it, Beat? Today I'm writing about my grandfather who's been up in heaven living a peaceful existence for a year now. December eighteenth of '06 was the one-year anniversary of the day he went six feet under.

Some of my family went bad after he passed away, and others was just after his money and his house and all that. But me, I took it the worst out of everybody in my family, because he was like a father figure to me and to my two sisters. He raised me since I was a baby. He didn't let nobody put their hands on me, no matter what I did. He showed me how to do a lot of things and how to fix a lot of stuff.

I was hurt more because I didn't get to go to his funeral. I was on EM (electric monitor) and my EM staff told me I could not go because it was too far away, plus out of state. I wanted to cut my EM ankle-bracelet off, but my grandfather would have been mad at me — so I just pimped it. RIP Larry Goitre: you will always be missed.

-Lil' Man Man, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We're sorry about your loss, but we know your grandfather would be proud of how you handled the situation, acting responsibly and dealing with your pain with strength of character — but that doesn't make it hurt any less! And yeah, the anniversary of a death seems to bring back the feelings of loss all over again. It stirs up the pain, and when it's a father or mother figure, makes you feel as alone as an orphan! Then seeing the rest of the family get all greedy and whatnot is just plain ugly to witness. We feel your love for grandfather is still strong and true. Keep making those good decisions that would make him proud of you, 'cause some of us believe that the spirit is eternal and he's still watching you.

Get Out, Do Right

I can't wait 'till I go home. I done been here for like four months. Hella long! I been in here for all the holidays! But I guess it's cool 'cause this is my last month. I go to court on February second.

I hope the judge let' me go home! I miss my family hella much! I have learned my lesson. I got my mind together. I'm gon' get out and do the right thing. I'm not gon' mess up on more. I'm gon' do what I'm suppose' to do: handle my business, go to school, get a job.

I want to be something in life, and I know I'm the only one that's going to get me there. But I guess I'm gon' have it under control, because I have learned my lesson. This is my last time coming to jail. I've promised myself and I mean it! I will not give this place no more of my life! I have already gave it too much time.

But I hope I get out, on everything! I miss my family and my daughter and my baby'momma — I want to go home! Man, y'all don't even know how I'm feeling, but I'm a boss. So I'm gonna stay strong.

-Night, 150 Crew

From The Beat: On the contrary, we feel the desperate intensity of your pain and longing to be home. And we commend you on your using that as the motivation to make those changes you need to make in your life to insure you'll stay home and not come back to incarceration. Be sure and get into action on making your new life a daily reality, with responsibilities you meet everyday. Because once you're out, the feeling you have now will slowly fade away, which is a good thing, so long as your motivation to change and your commitment to change don't fade along with it. So develop those daily habits early, and they'll help carry you through the hard times. Best wishes on your court date. If freedom's deferr ed, stay strong — the key is staying free after your release, whenever that may be.

My Simple Way Out

my way out is real simple
i am gonna put myself first
i'm gonna change my mind-frame little by little
i'm gonna slowly let go of old negative friends
i'm gonna learn to say no to those sweet temptations
i'm gonna focus on my education
i will get money the legal way
i will learn to honor my body
i will not come back to jail
i will say "no"
this is my way out

-Suggas, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Yes, simple, but not easy. Make sure when you're focusing on your do-right life, that you schedule in some positive sweetness. Rediscovering those simple pleasures will help you resist "those sweet temptations" that lead you down the road to degradation and incarceration. No one can "just say no" — so put some good things in your life!

New Year...

Next year in 2007 will be different. Like when I get out, I'm going to complete my program and try to go home. But it might be hard. As a matter of fact, I know it's going to be hard.

If I can't finish my program, then I'm going to get my GED, get emancipated, get on my own and get a job. Me and my girl will figure out what to do from there. My new year resolutions are to get off probation and finish school... and to live happy ever after with my one and only baby girl!

-Armond U4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Life is hard and will be until the end of time, so don't be discouraged just yet, you still have a long way to go. Anything that's worthwhile in the long run is worth starting now. We love the goals you've set for yourself. Only you — and time — will reveal whether you kept these promises to yourself or not. Good luck!

I Was That Ninja

I was that ninja when I was out, until I come up in this beeotch! But it' cool. I know I made a bad move, but it' going to be cool 'cause it' the last bad decision I'm going to make.

Before you judge me for what I became, I only ask that you take the time to fully understand what I was forced to become, understand why a kid start to hold it down for twenty-four hours a day trying to bleed for their block, and understand that these everyday struggles had a kid going crazy!

Can you understand that I was just trying to make a better way? But when you grow up in these streets, it's hard to see. So I made a lot of mistakes — and the police gave Travis a case.

-Choyce, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We've watched all your brothers walk down the same street to the same dead end, and since we don't believe in myths like "a bad seed" — we are clear that the choices you made were only partly voluntary. It's just as you say, it's like you just can't see any other way. It's a sort of environmentally produced disability. Recognizing you made a lot of mistakes is the beginning of changing your ways. As we see it, facilitating amends makes way more sense than retributive judgments, for sure — 'cause the street's full of retributive "justice" which looks more like the disease than its cure.

Believe

I was brought into the system because I got caught for prostitution. I feel I have not only shamed myself but shamed my whole family.

The reason, I believe, I got into the "game" is because of the life I've lived and the way I feel about myself. I do feel that my options are limited, but there is a way out, not only for me but for everyone who is going through the same struggles.

The first step is to think differently about myself. Instead of thinking that I have failed at everything and I have let everyone down, I have to think positive — forget the negative. I have to start thinking of what wonderful grades I used to get and no longer consult my fears but my hopes and dreams!

I have to think not about my frustrations by my unfulfilled potential. I have to concern myself not with what I have tried to do and failed at, but what is still possible for me to achieve. I am smart and so are you — you just have to have faith in yourself! When I get out, I'm going to "fix" myself and then educate other young people about my struggles and how I overcame them.

-Amanda, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Yes, you must each day tell yourself you will believe in yourself today, just for today, and focus on doing that all day — staying positive, or if the negative comes at you, letting it in the front door, welcoming it like an old friend, and then opening the back door and letting it out again. Day by day you'll rebuild those good habits that used to have you getting good grades, etc., and your self-confidence and self-respect will grow. If you can help others, humbly, not preaching down at anyone but as a servant and a friend, nothing restores your self-esteem faster than giving of yourself in a positive cause. You're already on the right track — now don't turn back!

What's cold?

What's cold is I'm walking down the street and some one came out of the bushes and they tried to scare us. But I had a rock and I threw it in the bushes an' hit him in the head.

What's cold is being in boys control in that cold ass room.

Cold is waking up in the morning and going to school.

Cold is this dude walking down the street and some other dudes walking up to that dude an' they dropped him.

-Feeling Cold, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Definitely the coldest thing you mentioned is the last. Why can't people just mind their own damn business? Why do they have to be up in each other's faces, being tough, being violent, being hateful? And what about that guy in the bushes...was he trying to attack you? Or was he just crazy? Did he deserve to get hit in the head with a rock?

What's my way out?

Love.
That's my way out.
All this love from all these people, really make me wanna change.
Actually I changed already.
I just need to show the world now.
My girl, my mom, all got a big part of me now,
but most important of all, there's me.
Staring at them four walls with nothing to think about
really focused my attention on me,
not big fat hairy me or mad ass me, but the real me that's deep inside.
I wanted to say for the longest.
Now back to this room, yeah man keep ya head up,
don't smoke fat-ass blunts, rather roll them personals.
Most important though, find yourself.

-Anonymous , 150 Crew

From The Beat: Wise words from a young man. It can take many years to come to these realizations. If you don't have a stake in yourself, it's hard for others to as well. Your mom will probably always have a stake in your happiness and success, but she can't make it for you on her own. You have to want it for yourself. Remember, that despite the odds, you probably have many, many years to live. What are you going to set yourself up for in that time?

Way Out

First of all there was never a way out for me
because I never was in any gang or group,
no thug life no hustla life, or nothing to get in but hard to get out,
or once you're in you can't get out.
So that's why I don't join gangs or groups.
I gots my own back, I don't need anyone else to stick up for me.
So I live my own life.
For everyone else who are surrounded by gangs or are in gangs
when you try to get out, find help to get out,
because you guys are too young to be getting killed especially at a young age.
There are better things in life than dying.

-Jack In The Box, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This is good advice, and you're right that there are better things out there. We also know though, that it's complicated for a lot of people—making a new life for oneself is really hard. But it is very possible and what you say about getting help is important. There are a lot of resources out there for people who want out.

The Last Time I Felt Wanted

I remember a time where my little B-G's got in some funk with some bigger dudes and they needed me to help them because they knew I could beat some of them up. When they asked me that, I felt like a leader. When we went to go see what's up, they got scared because we came way thicker so the funk was off. After that, we felt like bosses.

-Lil' Kj, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We're sure that the experience was exhilarating, but what happens if next time the other team comes back stronger? In the world of violence and competition, there's always going to be someone bigger and stronger out there—it's just a matter of time before you meet up with them. There is another way though, and it means choosing to use your mind before your might and thinking in a different way.

Crime's Easy, The Hall's Hard

The first time I came into YGC, I didn't feel comfortable. I didn't get used to it easy. After a couple of weeks, I got used to being in here. While I'm in here, I've been going to church services and thinkin' about my mom and I care about her more. I have learned that family is the only people that will always care for me.

Committing crime was easy, but doing time in the hall is hard. Now they don't want me to go home for another month. I'm about to be here for Christmas and New Year's. I've been here for most of the major holidays. When I get out, I'ma be a better person.

-DK U3, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You're lucky you have a family who sincerely loves and cares about you, DK — and they're lucky because you recognize just how important they are in your life. If you're going to be "a better person," how will that "better person" change the way he acts on the outs? What's your plan?

Christmas Eve

here come' santa
here comes santa
it's christmas eve
i can't believe
i hope he got the message from me
i want that barbie
i saw on t v
i want the beads
so i can make me earrings
so i can feel pretty
mommy i hope you told santa for me
i can't believe it's christmas eve
i can't go to sleep
but i wanna
so i can wake up and see what he brung me
come on nene, renz, panda, son
let's go to sleep, hurry
grandma wake me up early, please
i can't believe santa' coming
it's really christmas eve
i hope he knows i tried to be a good girl
"oh please santa be good to me"

-Jen, 150 Crew

From The Beat: What a sweet Christmas memory, all that excitement and anticipation, surrounded by those you love and who love you. We can't help but believe she got what she wanted for Christmas! But even if she got the beads and not the Barbie, we can feel the love in the household shared there by young and old. Thanks for this beautiful little poem!

It's a Cold Life

Cold? I think cold is when somebody does you scandalous, somebody that you think care' for you and love' you — and then does you wrong! Or they're not there for you when they are needed most. That's cold!

Another cold thing is when you come to jail. People, or your friends, forget about you. They act like you don't even matter. You don't get no letters. It's like they want you when they want you but they're not there when you need them. But I guess that's life, because it always goes that way.

Life is cold, or it's a cold life. I wish it could be warm instead of cold. I don't even get life, because sometimes it can be cold — then, at most times, it feels like we're living in hell. I guess life is what you make it, but it takes a lot and a while for us humans to know that. We start off wrong, then we have to change. Some people make the change and some people can't.

It's cold how we live for the moment, 'cause tomorrow is not promised. The impact of life is cold. The way we treat each other — everything — is cold. I guess, "It's just a cold world; so get a jacket."

-Night, 150 Crew

From The Beat: That jacket metaphor is interesting. What would a jacket that keeps you warm in a cold world look like? Would it be a high school diploma and a decent job? Would it be a family to love and support you? Would it be getting off probation, getting out of the system and making a new start? Would it be moving out of Oakland where all the same old people keep pulling you back into the same old games? Let's say you had to make a jacket; where would you start? "I'll never miss a day of school." Or, "No more alcohol or any other drug while I'm getting my life straight." Or, what?

A Polluted City

My name is Falisha. and I'm 17 years old. I live in the Bayview Hunters Point for sixteen and a half years, and now that I'm seventeen, I'm thinking about moving because of the pollution, here in the city.

I don't want to be here in a place like this, but this is where I'm from and it hurts me and makes me sad. I feel bad to see this, to see it looks and smells like this. This is where I come from. It's ridiculous, and when I go to other places, it looks good,

People that think, "Oh, the city is a nice, cool place to be, they're not from here. They only like what they see, because they haven't lived here so they can't say anything. I bet after a year if they stayed here, they would be ready to leave, bounce, go, adiós back to where they came from. That's real 'cause if I wasn't from here I know I would be ready to leave as soon as I put my foot down.

-Young Weezy U5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Here's the deal, Young Weezy. San Francisco, like every big city in the world, has its ugly, polluted and corrupted areas — jus as it has its beautiful, clean and uplifting areas. You can move to another city and find the same grime. Or, you can stay in this city and find what's fine. Have you been to the beach? It's free and beautiful. Have you been to Golden Gate Park? It's free and beautiful. Have you walked through North Beach, the Embarcadero, San Francisco State College? They're all free to visit, and all of them stand in contrast to what you have described. You do need to expand your geographic boundaries, but you don't have to go so far as you think to find something worthy to appreciate.

What's cold?

What's cold?
Is it cold when your main homie snitches on you?
Is it cold when you have nowhere to go
because the police is lookin' for you?
Is it cold when you get away and you go to see your two-week old son
before you get wrapped?
Is it cold when the police come to your baby mama's house
to get you and you just starting to feed your son
after you just changed a dirty diaper?
Is it cold that I just put my son to sleep
and the police made me give him to my girl so they can arrest me?
Is it cold that I was gonna turn myself in
'cause my ninjas got caught for me
come to find out that one of my ninjas blamed it all on me?
Damn it, it's winter.
But I do wish I could spend my baby's first Christmas with him and our family.

-Lazy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: All of those thing are cold. You're not lying. Does it feel like a lesson to be careful about who you trust, what you do and how you live your life? That maybe it's time to withdraw into family life and look out for you baby, your girl and yourself, and to forget about the others. But that means getting out of that life, that game, and finding a new way. Are you strong enough to do that?

My Projects

In my project there is a lot of people. We have our bad days and our good days. We argue, we fight, but then we're cool 'cause that's just how me and my goons are. I sit outside, get my hair braided by my sisters who argue over nothing, play fight.

We heard shooting, seen shooting as we grew up, seen the big homies fight, being noisy, looking out the window hearing your granny scream, "Bullets ain't got no name on it!" Watching fights out the window, seeing baseball bats being swing at cars!

-Young Weezy U5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Even though what you describe makes us sad — the fighting, the shooting, the noise, the baseball bats — we love that you have included these little details that let us into your world. It must be very hard to avoid all the negative things that are swirling around you, but at the same time, it can be even harder to join in those "games" and then have to live with the consequences. Don't forget that your little brother and sister are looking to you for how to act.

The Streets Is Death

The hall did a lot for me. I know a lil' bit, so when I get out, I'm gone try to stay out. This shhh not for me. I need to start doing some other things in life, because the streets is death and that's not what I want.

My brother got shot, and from that day on my life have been messed up, and I'm not even really living.

-B-Wizz U3, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We're really sorry about your brother, just as the death of everyone's brother makes us sad. What are the "some other things" you need to start doing to avoid coming into this place? What are the things you need to stop doing to avoid this fate, or worse?

Missing It All

I want people to know that I'm going crazy in here 'cause I haven't made love in about a month and a half. I miss being on the block with the homies, and that makes me stress. Also not being able to be with my girl. I miss not being able to see my family.

But it's really messed up because when I'm out there I don't really think about them. The message I'm trying to say is pay attention to your family because it's the only one who are gonna care for you when you get locked up. The homies are always gonna be there, but when you get locked up they ain't gonna be there.

But don't get it wrong. I love my homies and I love my family, but family comes first.

-Nacho U7, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We don't want you to get it wrong, either, Nacho. You simply can't have everything, which you don't seem to understand. The things you miss, from your girls to your family, are all within your power to have, but you can't have them and the block too. In the end, if you don't choose between them, the system will make that choice for you. That may seem cold and cruel, but keeping it real often is. If you know that family comes first, then you know what you have to do and not do. But knowing is different from doing.

Dedication

This is dedicated to the youngins and they boys an'
When they don't wanna go home 'cause they mom smoking poison,
Tryna get by every day, getting high slowly but surely.
That shhhh eatin' 'em up inside.
We too tough to cry,
so instead we grab a gun and ride on our enemies.
It's a shame so many of women get caught up in the game,
so many bra slain.
But the police don't take action,
just step back and watch it happen.
You ask the question,
they usin' genocide methods we cant defeat it
'cause all we see is cash and knockin' brothas on they back
who get in the path
We free at last
Or is we distributin' rocks to the fiends hoping God can forgive
My conscience killing gently maybe because I am guilty of the cause.

-Ro-Bang U7, SF/YGC

From The Beat: This is a tight poem, RB. It seems to us that there is enough blame and responsibility to go around — you for putting yourself here, and the cops and system for doing little to make a positive difference. Of course, while you complain about the cops not doing anything to stop the beef, while others complain that the cops too actively interfere. Seems like they're damned if they do and damned if they don't. If your conscience is killing you, it's also telling you... to try a new path.

Getting Out For Good

My way out the system is to clear my case. When I got out I'm going to get a job, and I'ma get a girl who is real, who is going to keep it real, who is going to stay by my side. I'ma stay out of trouble, and I'ma stay wit' my family.

-Yung Money U3, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We like the goals you've set for yourself, Yung Money. But one thing that's missing from your plan is school. You may not be able to appreciate it now, but we can promise you that education is the biggest key not just to open the door to the cage you're in now, but to open lots of doors that lead to lots of possibilities.

Free Us All

Free Bilitant,' cause I hold it down.
Free Ronnie, 'cause bro, you young and this ain't the life for you. You smart. You should be successful.
Free Lil' TB, 'cause, bra, you athletic and you could go somewhere in life.
Free Suave, 'cause, bra, you 18 years old. They ain't goin' play with you no more.
Free KXO, 'cause you just like Ronnie. Both y'all too young to be in the system.
Free Man Man, 'cause, bra, you one of the smartest ninjas I know. You can be somebody.
Free DV, 'cause, bra, you the most militant ninja I know should be in the army.
Free B. Ray, 'cause you can succeed in many goals.
Free De'Angelo, 'cause you got hands, bra. You can be a boxer.

-Bilitant U3, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You give excellent reasons for why each of these youngsters should get out and find another way, and we hope you apply the same reasoning to yourself. Holding it down is not a reason to be freed. Freeing your mind from the streets, the violence, the "them" vs. "us" mentality — now that is a good reason to be free. We hope you turn that keen sense of insight on yourself so that Bilitant can free Bilitant!

Both Negative And Positive

I feel that being in B3 has had a negative and positive outcome in my life. On the negative side, I've been away from my family and friends, and have been lonely in my room. The food they give us is nasty as hell. Some of the staff are rude and just don't care.

On the positive side, you can meet some interesting people. They make you go to school, and you get credits for going. And before I came to YGC I had never heard of The Beat Within and I like it.

-Smirks U5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We appreciate the fact that you like The Beat, Smirks. But we have a couple of questions. Besides getting credits for going to school, are you also learning the things school is supposed to teach you? Like what? And, if "some" of the staff are rude and don't care, can you write something about the other staff who are not rude and who do care? We'd love to read it.

Self-Direction And School — A Way Out

My way out is to keep to myself and don't get into any trouble. Also, when I get out I'm going go to school, attend my classes and try and play basketball for my school.

I also have taekwondo classes after school to keep me in shape, and I'm going to keep going to that. Another thing I'm going to do is to try and keep out of the streets.

-Ton U4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We like what you have in place for you to stay out of the system. Each of these activities should keep you focused on what's important to you, your family and your future. We do worry a little, though, about that "trying" to stay out of the streets. All those old street temptations (homies) will be there when you get out, and it will require some inner strength — even courage — to utter that simple, but very difficult word — No — when you feel their pull. Do you have that kind of courage? Time will tell.

The Streets

What cold? The streets, that's what. I seen drunk bastards get away with hit and runs on 2 or 5 year old kids. I seen them get away with murder. I seen kids play with guns and get killed.

-Lil' Burn U3, SF/YGC

From The Beat: What you describe is cold as ice, Lil' Burn. Do you contribute to the freeze, or do you try to try to warm up the earth with some kindness, some decency, and a big, big effort to stay out of those mean streets?

I'm Mad

these staff these days be acting hard
because they have the power and the keys
to lock me up in my room
when we get into an argument or a fight
they quickly press their scanner and spray their cans
that spray don't burn but just makes you close your eyes
and it gets you even madder and makes you want to fight
i've been sprayed hecka times but that mess don't phase me
the first time i was sprayed i was nine years old in this juvenile hall
the last time i got sprayed was when i kicked this ninja
that was repping this click that i don't mess with
but back to the staff 'cause this ain't about me
it's about the staff that think they got more power than me
because they got the keys to my door
and they got that scanner and them twenty people backing 'em up

-Main-e-bo, 150 Crew

From The Beat: They do have more power than you, for all the reasons you list. You gave them this power over you with the choices you were making out there, and continue to make — like mixing it up with someone from a rival click as if you were still out in the street kickin' it with your crew. What did that accomplish? Did he stop reppin' his set? No. You got pepper sprayed and locked in your room. So if you don't want staff to exercise their power over you, don't put yourself in their power like that when your inside. And when you're outside, get your pay the legal way, and the law can't mess with you or send you back to lock up for how you make your money. As you know some staff personnel are better than others, but it's on you not to put yourself in those situations where you give them power by giving them an excuse to spray, hit the scan, etc. When you exercise greater power over you anger, you'll reduce their power over you.

Time For An About-Face

I think my way out is to leave the street life and start a new life by getting education and a job. I gotta stop my messing up life and start going to college and get a part time job. Then, have my career eventually.

-Soda U7, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You have all the right words, John, but do you have what it takes to make these words a reality? Knowing what to do (which you clearly do) is not enough. Your actions, and not what you say about them, will determine your future.

Santa's Role In My Life

In my life, Santa really hasn't ever played a positive role in my life. In my eyes, Santa never stopped by the 'hood to drop off presents under my tree. And always, the next day all the rich white kids would say they got something from Santa. So, from that point on, I always would say, "To Hell with Santa!"

-Young Meel U7, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We understand exactly what you mean. For a much fuller explanation of what you felt growing up, check out Brandi's wonderful (but sad) piece on the same subject in this issue. It's a POW.

School's Where The Money Is

On some real stuff, it's hard to stay out the game 'cause life is hard and there are choices and propositions that are made in life. The hustler's life is a proposition. At first it sounds good. All you're thinking of is da money. Sometimes you win, sometimes you don't — and that's where you got to make a choice if that life is for you.

Personally, I'm beginning to think the diploma is where the money is at. Now don't get me wrong. If there was a way that I could I would make money like that... but police, feds and other people in the game is all hating on your high score, and that can make a man make the wrong choices.

RIP Mom, da game is hard to play without you!

-Cuba U4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You have our sympathy for the loss of your mom. But, at the same time, it seems to us you have answered your own questions in this piece. If it's "hard to play the game" without her, then maybe it's time to change the game you're playing. We want you to focus on that thought that's growing in your mind that the diploma is where it's at — and not just for money. Money is made, money is lost. But an education is like a permanent key that opens doors you don't even know exist yet. In the short term, pursuing the diploma may be the harder choice than the hustle. But it's the only choice that gives you a long term...

Sad, But Grateful

Well, to tell the truth, it's not a real Santa, but when I was younger I used to believe that there was a real Santa. But now that I'm older, I realize that the only Santa I had was my moms and pops.

I been feeling kinda sad that I'm about to spend my second Christmas in here. I know I'm not the only one spending Christmas in juvie and adult jails. We all should be at home with our family celebrating Christmas instead of spending Christmas with strangers.

To tell the truth, I'm happy to have a family at home because it's a lot of people that don't have families at home to go to. But I ain't got to much to say. All right Beat.

- Lgb U4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Even though you wrote, "I ain't got much to say," we think you said a lot! You recognize that the true "Santas" in your life were your parents. They sacrificed for you, and as you are maturing from childhood to young adulthood, you realize what you have — and what you owe. We're very sorry you had to spend another Christmas locked up, LGB, but we think your mind is moving in a much more positive direction that will lead you to be able to spend every day with those you love and not under the control of strangers. Those "Santas" at home want only one gift from you, and that gift is you. Can you deliver?

What I've Learned

The halls have helped. The first time I came in I was scared. I didn't really have a good or bad experience 'cause I wasn't in for that long. Being in juvenile for that period of time has helped me a little.

Now I am back in for the second time. To stay out these halls, I have to be smarter and wiser. I have to be smarter by not doing anything stupid to get locked up, and I have to be wiser by finding the right people to be around and hang with. In juvenile hall doing assignments like this makes me stronger and wiser, because it helps me think about the things I did and makes me change.

-Moncure U4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You're on the right path. It's too bad it's taken two trips back here to make you see things clearly, but on the other hand, we know people who have been here ten or more times who still don't get it. Of course, there's still much more developing and more room for improvement and lessons to learn, so don't be discouraged. Just remember to keep a open mind, and be an A+ student when it comes to studying and understanding "Self."

My Tear

Every night as I sit in my cell
I wonder if my life will ever prevail
Missin' my lady and my moms
With no one to turn to but the walls
My homies were never there
Waking up to nothing but guys
That's what I get for livin' my life a lie

Now a thug's cryin'
And God is replyin'
Now I've grown up to be a man
And the angels in Heaven give me one last chance

-Big-D Donshay SEF, Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: It sounds as if you have come to see that all is not lost – that you have another chance to make your future bright. Sometimes it takes a negative experience for us to realize that out current lifestyle is not working for us. Do you think that being locked up is sometimes a "blessing in disguise"?

My Smart Way Out

My way out is to stop doing what I'm doing, like going to the block, and stop doing stupid things. Finish school, and if I don't go to college, work in construction. But first I want to finish school.

-Jose U3, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Terrific, Jose. Every one of these goals tells us that you are putting your feet down on a new track leading to a future you can be proud of. We're already proud of you. Don't disappoint yourself!

I Wish I Could Be With You

I wish I could be with you
But you're so far away
I wish I could be with you
But I am locked away
I wish I could be with you
I love you so much
We used to always be together
I mean always
I really miss your touch
I wish I could be with you
But I got caught up
I wish I had magic power
I would change my past fast
So we could be together at last
I wish I could be with you
But it's all right I'll be out soon
But this time I'll never leave you
'Cause I am going to change
But not just for you
But for our unborn baby
Soon to be due

-Athena U5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: If you're about to be a mother, you're right, everything is going to change, whether you want it to or not. Now, everything you do from now on will affect your child to be. So think now before you act. You may not have magic powers to change the past, but you can change the future, and that's as good as magic!

How I Really Feel About Life

How I really feel about life? Man like this. Life is the best thing that happened to me because some of the things that I seen out there — like some people got no house to go to, I seen people sleeping on the corner and people who are not right in the head. And it's like shhh.

Some people take life for what it's worth. I just want to reach out to other people so they can know that there is somebody that is just like them.

-Flat Head U6, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Even though you are no longer in YGC, Flat Head, you are still teaching. It is good to value life, and to recognize that some people have it worse than you. Thank you for sharing.

What's Cold Is...

What's cold is the world we live in today
What's cold is the homies getting' kicked every day
What's cold is the way I live my life
But haven't changed yet,
but I feel like I'm on the verge of death
What's cold is how the DA, the judge and our lawyers get paid
What's cold is that as far as I 'm concerned,
the game that's played against me and my people
stuck in a cold reality within a cold room hidden from a cold world
The cold thing about it is it goes farther than me
The game they playin' on us is way too deep
Deep enough to make any soul freeze...
At these degrees one would go to the extreme
To get that heat and to breathe and reach that dream
And if it get too cold and you freeze below degrees...
Just think of a cold reality to make you steam
Steamin' hot to make you burn through any spot.

-Smirks U5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: You have set up the cold world and then given yourself a reason to change... If you're feeling on the verge of losing your life to this game, then take your words for the truth: "one would go to the extreme to get that heat and to breathe and reach that dream." Yes, indeed. So, what are you doing now to breathe and reach that dream?

Shed A Tear

As days go by, I wonder if I'll ever live life again.
At night I cry, wondering if God will ever give me another chance.
I try to change, but it's hard now;
I don't know what will happen.
My life will never be the same
That's what I get for thinking this is all a game.
As I shed a tear,
wondering if my angel will come down and wipe away my tears.
'Cause the end is near,
Now I will never worry about shedding another tear.

-Big-D Donshay SEF, Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: One great thing about life is that you can always make things better. Things don't always have to be the same. Our futures lie ahead of his as a blank piece of paper waiting for words. We have the power to take control of that piece of paper and create our dreams. We all have futures ready to be unfolded. Don't ever lose hope...write your future as you choose.

What's cold?

Cold is my P-O telling me I'm getting' out and I don't.
Cats lyin' to yo' face like a mark.
Cold is ninjas having no remorse for there wrong doings.
Cold is the police beatin' yo' ass to the point were your bones hurt for days. Cold is when you in cuffs on yo' stomach with a 200 pound cop on yo neck.

-Colder Than Ever, 150 Crew

From The Beat: There area few things in life colder than that, but we're afraid you've experienced too much cold in your young life. Have you ever done anything cold to anyone else? If the answer is yes, next time, think about how you felt in all the circumstances you described, and then think about whether you want to be an agent of that kind of coldness, or if you want to walk away and let things lie. Maybe all that coldness can be a positive lesson for how you want to live your life, rather than training you to participate in it.

What's Cold

The world is cold.
People gettin' locked up for no type of reasons.
The police hatin' 'cause we Black people
with dreads, gold teeth, stay dressed up.
They instantly think we are gang members
or sellin' some type of drugs.
This world is so cold everywhere I go.
I see a homeless person
holding a sign in the middle of the intersection.
I don't see no one tryin' to help them out.
People gettin' shot every day
in the streets
Girls cold, hatin',
tellin' my girl I tryin' to sleep or talk to them.
People I don't even know, never seen before.

-Lav-L, Marin

From The Beat: You spill the truths from how you see it and have experienced it. You've been hurt by people stereotyping you and by their jealousy. If you can do one thing to get rid of all this mess that exist in the entire world, what would it be? A couple things, don't set yourself up for failure. Leave the chillin' on the block/hood for someone else. Get yourself in school and be a lot smarter about who you associate with and talk to and with that said we bet some of this pain with go away.

The last time I felt wanted...

Last time I felt wanted when the police was chasing after me.
I felt wanted when my mom gave me a hug and told me I love you.
I felt wanted when my daughter said I love you.
I felt wanted when my baby mama chose me over her friends.

-Loved, 150 Crew

From The Beat: The thing about being wanted, is generally it's a good thing. Being wanted by the police is a turn of phrase, an expression, but it's actually when society has chewed you up and spit you out. The real wanting comes out of love, admiration, need, support, community. Which kind do you choose?

What's Cold

The judge is cold, 'cause she knows I'm Mexican
My therapist is cold, 'cause she never come see me
The system's cold, 'cause they stand out at night, looking for criminals
The staff is cold; they complain too much
My daddy cold; he loves me for what I am, not who I am
My room is cold; I get sick too much, waking up chokin'
Being locked up is cold; I miss the outs
My heart is cold, especially on drugs
Ice is cold, but I don't like eating them
I just know snow is cold, but it hurts after a while
Life is cold, but you already know

-Shy, Marin

From The Beat: We got one question for you: if you hate the coldness of what this world has, why are you insisting in being part of it? Wake up and take some responsibility! It's too easy to point fingers, now get busy!

The Fat, Shaggy, Little White Dog

Once, when I was a little boy, maybe I was about six, there was this little white dog on the other side of a fence. He had a shaggy coat and a shaggy face. He was sorta fat. He looked thirsty, so I got some ice and tried to give it to him. He came through the hole in the fence. My brother told me to leave the dog alone, that dogs don't like ice, but I tried to give it to him anyway. The dog came to my hands and when he sniffed the ice, he didn't like it and he started to chew up my hands. My brother had to pull me away from him. My brother was hella mad at me.

-Khiry, Marin

From The Beat: That must have been a scary moment. We're glad your hands healed and that they're now all right. What's your take on dogs and animals today?

Starting Over, Clean And Fresh

My way out is a job so I could get enough money to move away from all the drama and bullshhh in the life I have now. I just want to start over, clean and fresh... nothing on my record, nothing on my chest and nothing on my mind, That's my way out.

-Slick U6, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Except for that "nothing on my mind" part, we think you've set yourself some worth goals. The only thing we see that's missing from your formula is school, and school makes everything else on your list that much easier to achieve.

Fact Or Fiction

If you from California, you more than likely heard that San Francisco and Oakland got super tough beef. I have spoken to people from both sides, and it sounds like both sides feel the other don't like them.

I'm from San Francisco and I heard town people don't like us. So that make me feel like, "Forget Oakland!" But I asked some people about that, and they say they ain't got no problems, and it go likewise for my side. Yet we playin' each other when we caught slipping. In my opinion everybody seems confused about that.

-Kk U6, SF/YGC

From The Beat: It always makes us wonder whether the human brain is worth anything at all when human beings are able to fight (and kill) about such unimportant things as the spot they live on (which they didn't even choose for themselves). This is true whether it's block to block, city to city, or country to country. It's one thing to have pride in community — meaning to work for the betterment of where you live — and another to define that pride of place in terms of beef! Animals can be very territorial, but it would be nice to think that we are different from cats and dogs.

Bad Luck, Or...

Hello Beat,

I am going to tell you a story, a story of amazing unluckiness. It all started with me picking up a robbery case along with my graffiti crew (artistic juveniles) exactly one year ago. I was released exactly last year on December 19. I went home on home detention. After that I was doing better (not better, just sneakier).

Around the summer of that year I was getting drunk every day and started getting picked up for being drunk. One time I got picked up for "disturbing the peace" (party at a park). Another time I got caught at Safeway stealing a bottle of alcohol and I was with these girls I knew. At three in the morning, it was a ten man fight — ten Safeway workers against me.

Then I picked up a case for assault with a deadly weapon in July. I got sent to the Walden House 'cause I was drunk, and I had to serve three months. After doing two months, I ran and got caught 12 hours later. After spending five weeks in J-hall, I got sent to another rehab called Daytop. I wasn't planning on running until the fifth day there. So I ran. And I got caught 24 hours later.

It's kind of irritating when you think about it, comical actually. But it's not very funny to me 'cause now my life is messed up 'cause I don't know what's gonna happen. I'll probably go to an 18-month program or the Ranch, but right now all I could do now is wait...

-Artistic Juvenile U6, SF/YGC

From The Beat: First, we want to say that this is a standout because it is very well written — NOT for what is written! Even though you describe this series of events as "amazing unluckiness," we don't see that luck played any part in it at all. You picked up a robbery case not out of bad luck but because you robbed somebody! You went home and, by your own words, got "sneakier." You were drunk in public more than once, adding numerous other charges, including assault with a deadly weapon! You ran from rehab, which you foolishly approached as a sentence to serve instead of a program to serve you. Each of these events begins with a choice you made and an action you did. Where does luck come into it? Time to look at yourself, youngster, and realize that you are in control of your own destiny, and that by not addressing your alcoholism (which is obvious), you've allowed that control to slip away, first into a chemical dependency and then into a cold system of strangers telling you what to do and when to do it. Unlucky? We don't think so. Comical? Only to a child! Immature and foolish... ah, that's another story. Are you responsible for your life or is that the responsibility of others? When you write, "my life is messed up," you make it sound like it just happened to you, that you had nothing to do with it. Instead, you should have written, "I messed up my life." That way, you can see that it's within your powers and no one else's to fix what you've messed up!

At three in the morning, it was a ten-man fight — ten Safeway workers against me.

Dear Girls

Hope you get something out of this 'cause I don't know w'at I'm going for. Every time a boy tell you he think you special, there is truth in what he said, even if he's lying because a lot of y'all are special.

When I look at y'all through the window from U6, I see some young women who been through it, and that it's time for some recovery from whatever damage was done to y'all. I don't know y'all life stories, I only know what I see in yo' eyes and body language and character.

I hope y'all realize there is still hope for love, happiness, or whatever comfort you seeking. I ain't got enough time to finish, so take it for what you want.

-Kk U6, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We appreciate how heartfelt this is, KK, and we know the girls will appreciate it too. But, at the same time, you have your own issues to deal with, your own need for comforting, your own need for recovery. So, while we admire your feelings for others in similar situation, we hope you look first to yourself and find a way to provide the healing you need in a way that keeps you safe and free. As Jesus says in the Bible, "Physician, heal thyself." (Luke 4:2)

The Next Year

In a little more than two weeks, it will be 2007. Right now I'm in a rehab in SF, and it's shown me how much shhh I need to work on. It's gonna be a new longer year, and maybe, just maybe this year will be better. My year has gone by with so much pain and misery and no is to blame but myself.

I have to earn and show I deserve people's trust and respect back. All the stupid shhh I've done this year was so pointless, but at the time I thought, it was all right — from lying, stealing running and using. But where did it get me? Here at a rehab. Maybe it's what I needed, a big wake up call. This year is gonna be different, hopefully. All I can do is take it day by day and pray in 2007 I'll find my way.

-Pinky, Walden House PSK

From The Beat: We think your are now tackling the most important impediment that has been holding you back, your addiction. When you stay high, you can't think straight (literally), and that affects every other part of your life. We're not saying that if you get control of that problem, everything will be fine and you'll live happily ever after. Struggle is part of all our lives. But it's one thing to struggle while you're being controlled by a mind-altering chemical, and a very different thing to struggle when you are in control of your own mind and body. If you continue in sobriety, we think you will surprise yourself at just how much you will gain, and far you will go.

I Did Wrong, Now Changed

I was really bad
When I ran from home
One thing you don't know
Is do ya eva catch me solo
Well I started getting locked up
It didn't help me very much
I was in and out four times
Because I kept lyin'
But finally my last time being locked up.
It has really led to PSK Walden House
And I know da message was to turn my life around

-Lil' Shorty, Walden House PSK

From The Beat: You've got the message. Some of us learn things the hard way... But the important thing is that we learn them. Good for you. Now, let your life prove your words...

The New Year

The new year is gon' be a wrap. My first thing gone be I'm not gon be using drugs! Finally I'm going to start off a new relationship with my family an' friends. 'Bout to get me a legit job. '07 is my year. I'm gone keep rapping wit' Cache Phlow. By '07 I will be known all around the Bay Area. Remember Yung Jazz'ah Belle, real talk.

But I really 'bout to be on some grown women stuff, ya dig. In '05 I was cattting off and all '06 I'm in a rehab. When I get out of here all the lil' daddies gon try to holla, but I'm gone keep it moving 'cause I got my lil' daddy. You know who you are.

-Jazz'ah Belle, Walden House PSK

From The Beat: If you keep to your word not to use, then it's not just your family and friends that you'll be starting a new relationship with, you'll also be starting a new relationship with yourself as well. We admire your passion about making it as a rapper, but we think that first goal you mentioned is far, far more important — and, if you keep that promise, you have a much better chance for the success and fame you seek.

What I Took For Granted

The thing I want to talk about, that I took for granted, is my education. I've always gone to school, but I've never worked hard. I used to think all those people who worked hard in school were nerds. Now I realize they were just trying not to end up like me – locked up. If I'd worked hard and had graduated from high school, I'd probably still be out there. So, when I get out, I'm going to work hard, and graduate, 'cause it will help me stay out of here.

-Malcolm, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: Not to mention that with your natural mental gifts, you could be doing good things in the world. You might be helping other kids stay out of trouble. Sometimes it takes one who's been through the ropes to communicate with another youngster who might be headed down the wrong path. At any rate, we applaud your decision to finish what you started. We know that if you put your heart into it, you will excel.

My First Time Seein' Santa

When I was little, I saw the real Santa.
He gave lots of presents.
I wish I could see him again.
I gave him cookies and milk.
And he gave me a letter.
I was two years old when I saw him
And it made me so excited to see the real Santa in person.

-Lil' Yugioh, 150 Crew

From The Beat: If Santa could give you the serenity to ignore what others say when they're trying to be cruel, you'd see past the foolish words of mean-hearted fools who think teasing is cool. Yeah, that's what we wish Santa would give you first on his list. 'Cause now we know the real Santa must exist.

New Year

This new year will be away from home. This new year gone be different from home... I'ma be stuck at a group home, tryna make da best of shhh. But this new year will be better than last, I'ma learn from my mistakes....real talk.

-Crackhead, Walden House PSk

From The Beat: To be honest with you, this is one of the most promising (though brief) pieces we've read of yours. Learning from our mistakes is what we all try to do. And making the best of things is all that anyone can ask. We see what you're capable of. Do you?

Taking Things For Granted

Yes, I blew it. I took my freedom and my dad for granted when I left my dad's house to go be homeless, and be an addict for a month.

Then, on a day in November, I fell asleep on the levee and was awakened by the cops. They arrested me and I got sent here. Now I'll be going to a group home in San Jose for six months. That's how I blew it.

-Ricky, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: Well, we're glad you're safe now, and that you'll have some structured time to get you life back together. We hope you've been able to talk things over with your dad and that soon you'll get another chance to make amends.

Police Cold

when i was sitting
in front of my house playing
with my big cousin
and the police pulled up
at first it looked like
they was going to
ride past
but they stopped
and bounced out
and took me
and my cousin to jail
and they
took five hundred
dollars from me

-Cold Play, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Terrific little poem! And we agree that two wrongs don't make a right. But we feel you're not giving us the whole story. On the real, how'd you get that five hundred? Just wonderin'. (You didn't write a name, so we gave you one.)

Squires

What's up, Beat! This ya boy Lil' Ant from Hayward. We went up to San Quentin for a Squires Program. It ain't really nothin' up there. It's just like the Hall for Adults, where people get raped and killed everyday!

We walked by death row and maximum security units. They showed us where people buy food: they call it the canteen. They also put us in the cells for twenty to thirty minutes. They have the same blankets we have in the Hall, and the mattresses are the same.

It ain't a place I would want to be. If you come up to Camp, you will go. Well, Beat, I'm out 'till next time. Lil' Ant, and I'm out!

-Lil' Ant, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It seems like you learned two things at least on your visit to San Quentin: (1) incarceration anywhere has a lot of things that are just the same, but also (2) it's more like a hall for adults that's so big, it's like a city where people get raped and killed every day. So, yeah, it's a place from which any sane person would want to stay away! To insure that though, you need to change the choices you make when you're outside and free. You never know when selling drugs, robbing or hitting licks can set you up for a serious charge that will have you tried as an adult, facing many long years in the pen'.

I Remember (verse 1)

I remember we was young
Lil' side hobbs
Posted and running the streets
And fighting—see, it never stopped
Girl Roc, Baby Roc
Hit the block
Them my young hittas
And we used to make the block hot
Vallejo Middle School
That used to be the hot spot
Until them boys start to come
Wit' them crooked cops
Then we grew up
And went to high school
Third week I got the boot
And after that it wasn't coo'
Y'all gave me all the support that I needed
Continuation school
Yeah, y'all forced me to complete
I love y'all for that one
Ya know, to the end
If I ever get big
Then y'all coming wit' me, man
Zakiya, Tianna, Naomi, Serena, Shelly, Janae and Brittany Be wit' y'all one day
Blowin' big purp and sippin' on Heem
Can't nobody tell us nothin'
'Cause we doing our thang
We them young savs
Oops, my bad
We grown
Be expectin' me soon
'Cause one day
I be home

Hook
We stayed kickin' it
And running the streets
Those days were so clear to me
I remember...
The way we used to party at night
And even we fuss and fight
I remember

I Remember (verse 2)
I remember late nights
We used to sneak out the house
About the same time my ninja, Nae
And Rodney went out
Y'all used to post up in the garage at two
Mom caught y'all one day
And made y'all sleep in my room
I remember one day
Me and Rodney got caught
Wit' two girls in the house
And y'all was hella hot
Used to stay up all night
Cookin' Top Raman
And had hella sleepovers
Without my moms knowin'
I remember that one day
I shot Janae
Wit' the BB gun
She got mad and start cryin'
But I was just tryna have fun
I remember back then
We used to stay wit' each other
But some of us grew up
And started hating each other
Remember back then
We play hide and go seek
I still remember that Halloween
When Janae borrowed my jeans
But if you feeling me
Then what you remember?
But I want it as a present
So tell me up in December
'Cause I remember

-James, Marin

From The Beat: Those times are over and the only things that are left are consequences, loneliness, time and suffering. You need to leave the past in the past. What you're facing is not a joke, and instead of writing the way you were, you should be looking way in using this time to become someone better. Life is only one and once it's gone, it's all over.

I Really Love You

(To My Girl)

Hook:
Baby, I really love you
You're so fine
There's no one above you
I need your kisses and your hugs
Girl, I need your love (2x)

Verse 1:
It was way back in junior high
When I was yours and you was mine
Let me take you back in time
To the day we first met
You looked so fine
That day I'll never regret
You was the new girl at school
I was a little fool
Somehow I found the heart to spit at you
One thing led to another
We became lovers
I had this feeling inside
I always wondered what it was
Now three years later
I realize that it was love

Hook" (2x's)

Verse 2:
I need a kiss and a hug
Your sweet love
Open up your heart to me
You're the missing part to me
Girl, I need ya
I'm here to love ya
I'm here to please ya
You're like a rose
In a field full of daisies
You amaze me
I'm your man
You're my lady l-o-v-e
Please tell me that you love me
Hug me
And give me a kiss
I'm like a genie
And you're my one wish

Hook (2xs)

Verse 3:
These feelings I have for you
Is hard to explain
I really love you
Do you feel the same?
Girl, I'll do anything
To have you in my life
Let's make our love last
Will you be my wife?
I give you the key to my heart
So come on in
Without you
I've lost, girl
I wanna win
There's an Olympics for our love
We score a perfect 10 so let me be your man 'til the end.

Hook (2xs)

-Eli, Marin

From The Beat: Nice love song! You compose a beautiful song and plus you sing it to our Beat workshops. Now you're even writing them during your own time and giving them to us. Everyone loves when you sing to them. Have you ever sang in public? Tell us about your love for singing.

I Did Wrong, Now Changed

I was really bad
When I ran from home
One thing you don't know
Is do ya eva catch me solo
Well I started getting locked up
It didn't help me very much
I was in and out four times
Because I kept lyin'
But finally my last time being locked up.
It has really led to PSK Walden House
And I know da message was to turn my life around

-Lil' Shorty, Walden House PSK

From The Beat: You've got the message. Some of us learn things the hard way... But the important thing is that we learn them. Good for you. Now, let your life prove your words...

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Merry, Lovely Christmas...

Sittin' next to fear
By my bedside every night
Dunno where I'll end up
Just knowin' this shhh ain't right
My dad and bro' be at home
Moppin', waitin', contemplating
When will she come home
To her empty room?
How long will they be waiting?
My mind is tired
And my soul is restless
I ain't giving up
Without a struggle
I wanna go home to my boy
Be in his arms
So we can just snuggle
Forget it
My Christmas is over

-Tatiana, Marin

From The Beat: Many of us who have been incarcerated have felt the feeling you write about this week. We are glad you know what is right and what is wrong, so how will you go about improving your life? What's your plan upon returning home?

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From The Beat: If you keep to your word not to use, then it's not just your family and friends that you'll be starting a new relationship with, you'll also be starting a new relationship with yourself as well. We admire your passion about making it as a rapper, but we think that first goal you mentioned is far, far more important — and, if you keep that promise, you have a much better chance for the success and fame you seek.

I Should've Listened

when you told me "boy go and get a job"
if you don't you gonna have to sell dope or rob
— i should've listened —
when you said i need to be in college
but instead i was makin' more money standing in the projects
— i should've listened —
when you said keep playing basketball
but i was making more money standing in the hall
— i should've listened —
when you said i need to be in church
but instead i was at the park blowing purp'
— i should've listened —
when you told me to watch for them boys
'cause yesterday my potna got jack' and went to jail
— i should've listened —
god bless — i love you — mom

-Young Moneys, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Thank you for putting your mother's wisdom out there for the next one to hear, now that you've finally gotten it clear! You know, money isn't evil, any more than food is (which is why hustlers are always saying, "I got to eat"), but when it gets too much of a hold on you, to the point where it's all you want to do — to where it's an obsession (can't get your mind off it) and a compulsion (can't stop doing it) — it's effect on you is evil, which is to say, harmful, because you've become afflicted with the disease of addiction — and it doesn't care about your moral, physical or emotional condition! We suspect your mom already understood what we're saying, and that's why her advice was so good, while you were straying. Time to get back on the right track. Much love and respect; also give your mom our best!

Camp Is Boring and Easy

Man, Camp is boring and easy. I mean you got to wait awhile till you get your first HV. But I mean, it's hella easy! Basically you're outside most of the time.

But just don't be talking and don't get no write-up's, because if you get a write-up, you get four hours off your HV (home visit). And that's not good, because when you go home, you not gonna wanna come back early. You're not gonna wanna come back at all — but don't run from this Camp, because it's the easiest program you can get!

And don't think you're gonna get in a fight, because you're not! They just talk a lot of mess and try to screw up your program. So peep game though and don't run from here, even though they make it so easy for you to run. They do that so that you will play the fool and run! Then you just stay in the system and to go YA or some group home far away from your home!

-Anthony, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You're giving the straight skinny on why no one should run from Camp. Or, backing it up a bit, why no one should get in fights at Camp, get write-up's, get sent back to the Hall for a few days, or, as you make clear, run from the easiest program you're ever going to see. That said, not running is only half of the solution to the problem you're trying to solve — how to stay free — 'cause you should also use this time to come up with a better strategy than going back to the same things you used to do that got you locked up to begin with (and don't kid yourself that you just got unlucky; 'cause if you're here, you more than likely set yourself up to fall, even if you didn't get caught for the dirt you really do or didn't even do what you plead guilty to). Well, thanks for lacing our readers on surviving at Camp Sweeney.

don't run from here, even though they make it so easy for you to run

Restricted

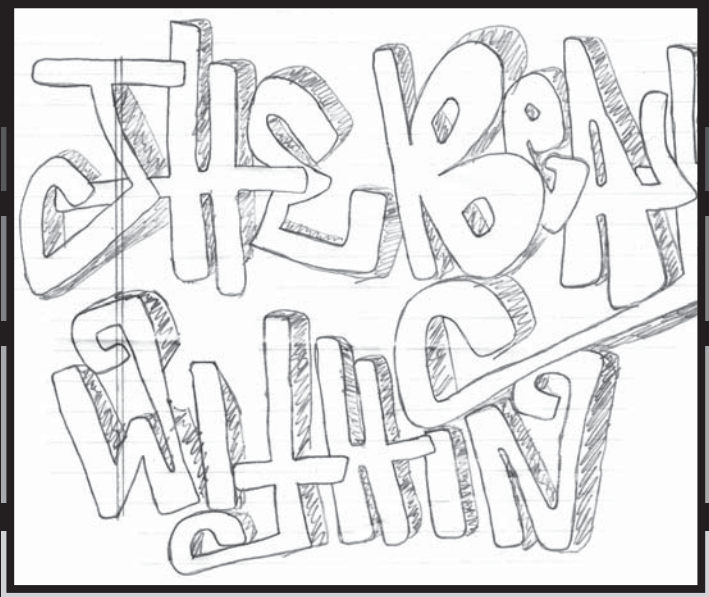
Well, today I'm going to talk about being restricted, and the whole reason why I got restricted was: Everyone in the whole Camp was given a twelve-hour pass for Christmas, and I went home at about 8:35 or 8:40 AM — I had to be back at 8 PM the same day.

But anyway, I went to my house, and my mama took me by my friend's house to visit. So she dropped me off as soon as I got over my friend's house, and we kicked it. Then I left to go to my ex-girlfriend's house. When I went there, I kicked there for a cool minute. Then I walked to the bus stop, and one of my friends was smoking a blunt of weed — and he tried to blow the smoke a different direction, but somehow I inhaled the smoke of the THC.

You would have though, as fast as I hopped on the bus, that I would have been clean three hours later! I went home and was at home with my family for the last hour at my grandma's house. Then my mama took me home to change into my clothes to go back to Camp. But when I went to Camp and got tested, I was dirty for THC! I guess the test was sensitive, even though I didn't smoke! All I can say is: If you go to Camp, don't even go out — stay with your family!

-Twan, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Your advice at the end is pretty darn good. If you do go out to kick it with friends though, don't hesitate to tell them that you can't even be around smoke — plus, you don't want to be tempted by watching, smelling, etc. If that person really is your friend, he or she won't smoke in front of you. But it's on you to be clear and firm. The truth is that it's good practice for when you're released on probation and get surprised by a test now and then — 'cause the best way to pass it is to watch your ashes, uh, not! Thanks for warning the next Camp Sweeney camper, on the real. 'Cause those visits with family mean a great deal.



Key To Get Out

Where has this led me?
It seems like it's dead, but inside the walls of this cell
--odd bricks, no seeing past the rippled glass.
Without a pass to freedom.
I just wish I could decide when I want to go outside.
I want to say hello to my friends and family.
But then, again, hey, I don't have the key.

-Anthony, Marin

From The Beat: Given where you sit, have you figured out how this happened? How you fell prey to the system? What is your plan to stay out when you get your total freedom back? It sounds to us like now you know where you must go and what you must do when freedom ring

Cold Inside and Out

it's cold when you go to court
the peedee says "you gettin' released"
and then the judge says
"detained 'till the second"
and now it's mid-december
it's cold when you lay awake at night
thinkin' 'bout how you could have avoided this
it's cold when you do dirt with your family
and when police show up they squeaky clean
it's cold on the streets with nowhere to go
so you fight to stay warm
it's cold to get released to come right back
it's cold to live life a suspect
it's cold but after the night
the sun comes up and melts the snow

-Lil' D, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You need to instigate divorce proceedings from both the system and the street, beginning with our so-called family that leads you to dirt and leaves you to take the hurt. There's a message there if you're brave enough to face it. As for the system, yeah, you need to fight for your freedom with your heart and your brain, 'cause the system is all about pain — so you need to divorce yourself from both the system and the game. That's the sun that will melt the chains frozen to your feet with its righteous heat. Get your degree! Get a legal j-o-b! Stay off the street and you won't need a PD or a judge's release.

Since I Was Nine

my life has been messed up
ever since i turned nine years old
and i been playing with guns
ever since i got a gun in my hand
it seems like they never left me
my whole life i've been around
guns money and drugs
i wish i could've had a different life
instead of growing up like
a little savage and bein'
everybody' beegee but
forget it i am who i is

-Darnell, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You can't change the past, but you can change what it means. Right now for you it means that you can't change your life from what it's been. But when you feel that "wish" to have "a different life" deeply enough, maybe you'll find the courage to try it — 'cause that desire is also who you are! And you're kind of person who does what he wants; so keeping wanting that different life — then do something about it, now!

How Come I'm Locked Up

i made a bad decision
and now i'm behind bars
i did something wrong
that kept me locked down for too long
just waiting for the day
they let me out
to make out of me
a new me
'cause i wanna keep goin' on
so people be proud of me
and not just saying stuff
about what i did
this is the time
for me to change
so i can be proud of me
doing better every day

-Anewme, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Have you ever felt this way before? If not, then you're already a new you — and now what you need to do is follow through. Isn't it a trip how in the Hall, people brag about being bad but have to keep wanting to do good on the down low! Well, we're proud of you already! (Hope you don't mind the name we gave you: "a-new-me"!)

D-Boy Danny (RIP)

why they had to kill my boo
they might as well should have killed me too
i'm sitting here just thinking about you
asking god why this had to be true
i took two strikes for you
i would have died for you
last night i thought i felt you in my room
but it was nothing but the wind and me dreaming of you
i still think of all the night i was close to you
and when i said i love you
you always said that you loved me too
i remember when you bought me my first glock
i used to bleed the block running from cops
always trying to be the first one on the block
i was just thinking — why you had to stop
why you got popped — we used to be on top
i thought it would never have stopped
ninjas used to be on our jock
now i'm sad 'cause you're gone
i'll never be able to talk to you on the phone
forget this poem — i'm still alone
ain't nothing i can say that will bring you home
i don't know what to do
now i wish i could kill them ninja who shot you
thinking about you dreaming about you
got me going crazy
thinking how i could have had your baby
i wish i could have spent
the rest of my life with you
one dose of you had me addicted
around you i didn't know how to act
everybody said you would hurt me
but nobody knows me
you told me nobody could ever compare to me
i can't leave him alone
i tried that good-boy game
but the dope boys turned me on
i had a good guy that was there for me
damn danny i can't believe you're gone
it seems like just yesterday
i was talking to you on the phone
right now i'm just feeling all alone
just wishing i could have been at home
i just wish that i could
see your face
take your place
this is a memory i could never erase
i'm in this place for a lick that i can't take
i remember when me and you and scooter used to ride
you never left the house without that forty-five
i wish i could die
to be right by your side
now i can't stop these tears from rolling down my eyes
just remembering when you was alive
even though you was messing with that witch
i was still by your side — ready to die
now i'm wearing your face on my brand new sweater
wishin' we was still together whatever the weather
pushing all that black together
wishing it would last forever
[to be continued...]

-Aleisha, 150 Crew

***From The Beat:** Words cannot express the full extent of either your love, your pain or your loss, even words as powerful as yours in this poem. But you know this already, 'cause you say so in the line where you turn on the poem itself because it is powerless to change the reality of his death and your hurting heart. So what words can we append to yours? Nothing half as powerful or real. And yet, just as it's undeniably real how alone you feel right now, that you are still alive is as real as life! And we thank God you're still alive. Maybe if you had been out there with him, you wouldn't be here either — and we know that's what your broken heart in its raw pain feels would be the right thing. But death is nothing to desire, not his, not yours, not anyone's. How will the memory of your love for him live if you are not alive to live it out? And you know it was the life style he chose (it should be called a death style 'cause that's where it goes: jails, hospitals and death), it was that gangster life you shared on the block that killed him. So if you want to get mad at his killers, get mad at that life style 'cause that's what killed him. Kill it in your heart! Keep your love for him alive, but kill that "ride to die" mentality that killed him. When you're released, and it will be soon, don't go back to packing a glock on the block, 'cause it took his life way too soon. RIP D-Boy Danny.*

This Place Is Stupid (J-Hall)

look at me and my life
this place is so stupid
why i'm i this stupid place
man i feel like my life is going downhill
and my grandma feels like this place
is for kids that don't have places
they don't have to go to
but i have to get out this stupid place
it's like a kid here can act out like she's
under the age of twelve even if she's eighteen
it's like i'm locked up with my cousin joe
man i want to get out this stupid place
please let me go home to my one beautiful home
to my crazy mother and my sweet kind grandma who
took me in when nobody else would or could
i'm so thankful and grateful to her
but this place is so stupid and these clothes suck too
now my grandma and brother nephew brother's girlfriend
they came to visit but staff wouldn't let them come see me
but only my grandma was let in and my grandma said
this place is stupid, i'm praying for you every day
let the lord be in your heart and just believe and keep faith
and everything will go well, i'll see you on the twenty-second
i love you and come home soon

-Lil' Snow Rabbit Mele, 150 Crew

***From The Beat:** We don't remember how you got here (did you get in a fight with your "crazy mother"?), but we do know that you will benefit more from focusing on eliminating the stupid things you find yourself doing from time to time (even if they are provoked by circumstances beyond your control and/or people beyond your control) than keeping yourself angry the whole time you're in here. But maybe you aren't angry all the time. Maybe you're just writing to get the anger out of you, letting it spill onto the paper so we can carry it out the unit door with us and you can read about it in a few weeks and remember when you were so mad at everything and everyone here. It's a shame you didn't get to see your whole family, but focus on your blessings — the love they showed in coming. And follow your grandma's advice, 'cause she is faithful, compassionate and wise. All will be well in, as they say, God's time — so be patient while you're waiting.*

My Future

my future lies away from these walls
to a place where everyone's free
and can be who they want to be
away from shadow
out of the dark
light in the sky where
the day comes to it full
filled with treasures and riches
and five story mansions
in a world of technology
letting computers advance to a new degree
from the path i escaped
left it in the dust
being my best
putting myself to the test
letting my heart rest and be at ease
fulfilling my dreams
my future holds for me

-Jacob, 150 Crew

***From The Beat:** More than a dream that disappears when you awaken, these are visions of the future you once had forsaken and now have reclaimed as your own better future, as the new life you now choose to live you continue to nurture. Now your future holds you like a babe in arms, like a mother promising her baby will come to no harm.*

Killed More Than Just Time

the moment you turned your back on me
i was dead to you
i struggled to live
but you suffocated me with silence
so i walked dead among the living
then thought i was alive for a moment
until a bird mimicked your voice
in my ear and reminded me i was dead
dead without you at my side
so i never returned to her nest
and i tried to forget you
until i thought i saw you
so i ran, i ran away
then called out to see if it was you
i still don't know
if you lied to me
i wouldn't be surprised
and it wouldn't matter
because i still love you
i will always love you
and as long as you're not with me
it will always hurt
it hurts ever after death
and i can do nothing as long as you're happy with him
and as long as you're tainted with his seed
sometimes i wish again you'd kill me

-Jacob, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We know it seems impossible to believe that the pain will, if not pass, grow more dull until it is merely a scar, a memory of a wound, that neither killed your heart nor your ability to love another. And we know there is little solace in such a thought, for it is less a poultice for your pain than it is a dam against insanity — persevere, endure this difficult time. Don't deny the pain, but don't nurse it and keep it alive longer than need be. And if she's pregnant with another's child, well, let that child's life erase your hate, for it lives beyond the story of how it came to be — every newborn soul deserves love eternally. And if anyone should understand such a need, it is J-a-c-o-b.

Wondering

I have been wondering why a lot of things have happened to me
I don't know why, but I've got to figure things out, you feel me?
All this wondering is making me feel like I am missing something in my life
But I don't know what it could be, so I keep on wondering what is it?
Finally it hit me. I was missing love from mom, but I know someone for sure that loves me like I was her own child.
But why am I still wondering? I don't know but I just keep on wondering and wondering.

-Jaquilla, Maricopa County, Arizona

From The Beat: Sometimes it doesn't make sense why things happen to people whether it is bad or good. What is it that is missing in your life? Do you have goals? People you care about? Self esteem? It sounds like you do have people that care about you.

RIP Rhonda Downs

My big sis' Rhonda passed away from a heart transplant. She was a real pretty, light-skinned girl with pretty hair and hella funny! We always would talk. She "go hard in the paint"! Yep! That's my big sis'!

Anyway, it was a cold night when we found out on the first of November in 2005 at 3:30 in the morning that she went to Children's Hospital 'cause her heart was hurting. Two hours later, she was gone. RIP Big Sis'! We got a call, and my heart sunk. She will always be missed. Rhonda Downs, Oakland's Finest!

-County Snack, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Thank you for sharing your love and the pain of your loss with our readers. It leaves a hole in your heart as if an invisible shot through when you lose someone so close to you. RIP Rhonda Downs.

Cold Is When ...

cold is when you on yo' own
striving for love
feeling like you need a few hugs
but all people show you is mugs
cold is when you lose self-control
spending yo' christmas in a dirty jail cell
wit' no one to talk to, no one to love you
cold is when yo' family gives up on you
'cause you lie and steal
cold is when you been getting in trouble
since you was a young teen
now you wonder why you lie, steal
and sometimes wanna kill
hitting licks all the time
jus' to show you could shine
now you behind bars
searching for yo' shining star
knowin' it's not that far
but since you behind bars
you'll never see it

-Joshua, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You can still see your shining star from afar, if you look long and hard between the bars into the Christmas sky of your own imagination, where you see yourself finally released from incarceration and ready to stop fast-money chasing and get a job, ready to quit the mob and get our diploma or GED, ready to live responsibly and stay free, even in a group home for a while, whatever it takes to escape the game that damns you to incarceration's pain sooner or later, ready to bury your kater and make your pay the right way, ready to stay free the way you were always meant to be.

Wanted/Needed

the last time i felt wanted
was when i thought i was wanted
but instead i wasn't wanted
but just mistreated
when you feel wanted
you really don't need it

-Lil' Chad, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Ouch! This short poem hurts to read. Don't let anyone else's act bring you to your knees — take care of yourself and stay on track to succeed.

Clean, Sober And Mature

The Lord is my Shepard. He holds the key to my peace and understanding. I've been a Hillcrest resident of four years, and I'm finally doing my last time in this place.

I've been a recovering addict my last three years and managed to pick up 21 month clean off drugs and learned to mature so much after I realized what this life was doing to me. I'm a good person on the inside, I just struggle with small things.

I love and miss my family so much and knowing that I upset them and let them down I can only move forward and believe I can show them how I can improve. I'm proud to know I can change. Thank you family I love you.

-Add 'em Sailor

From The Beat: Well, we don't get your Beat name, but we most definitely get your Beat message, and we congratulate you from the bottom of our hearts! Nearly two years off drugs is a powerful foundation on which to build a life that you and your family can be proud of. We are already proud of you.

Gang Life

Gang life equals pain
Pain equals hate
Hate amounts to fights
Fights become jail time
Jail brings more gang life

-Elvis

From The Beat: It amazes us that you have managed to squeeze so much truth, such a profound understanding, into five short lines! This is the system's vicious circle. But what is the vicious circle that leads to that gang life in the first place? And how can you get off the circle?

Wanna Know

I wana know why my people are the ones filling up our penitentiaries.
I wanna know why our people keep messing up

-Elvis

From The Beat: These are both excellent questions, but there's only one question that you can — and should make a real effort to try to — answer, and that is: Why do YOU keep messing up?

He Don't Know Me

I have a lot of people in my life dat try to change me. But da main person is ma dad for da fact he don't really know anything about me. All ma life he been back and forth in jail.

-No Name

From The Beat: Maybe your dad is trying to tell you that if you don't make some changes you'll have the same sad experiences he has, "back and forth to jail."

Disconnected

I don't want to connect with anyone and I don't want their help. I've l always done things for myself because I get let down when I rely on others. I don't want people meddling in my life. I'll change when I want to, not when they want me to.

Jail is about you. No one else can help you here and if you rely on them, you'll just end up disappointed. Only you can change yourself for the better and you're the only person you can rely on. So screw your help! And screw the system. Trust no one.

-Valerie

From The Beat: You are SO wrong, Valerie! No one — not you, not us — can entirely depend on themselves alone. All of us, including you, are social animals that rely on each other for various things throughout our lives, and it's nothing more than a lie you tell yourself that you're doing it all on your own. And, it's a very dangerous lie because it forecloses the possibility that you will seek the aid of people and/or organizations who really can help you (but, like you say, ONLY if you want help), plus it blinds you to the reality that there are good people everywhere (along with the bad). You can scream, "Screw the system" till your lungs give out... but the truth is, it only works in the other direction... Word to the wise...

Don't Try To Change Me!

People piss me off when they try to change me. I don't want to change, and I don't want anyone to try and change me. I will change whatever I want whenever I decide to. That is if I change to do so.

-Jessica

From The Beat: It's not that simple, Jessica. Change can also be imposed on you — as you are experiencing right now! Yes, REAL change must come from your own desires to change, but don't fool yourself into thinking that you are free to do whatever you want to do until you want to do something different. None of us has that kind of freedom!

Encouraging Change

I think that the people that are trying to change my life, I think they're doing it for some reason. Either they're trying to help you not end up bad in life, or they're doing it because they just want to get paid.

I know they're doing it for a good reason, especially if it's your family, because your family comes first than anything, and if they want you to change, it's for some good reason, not a bad reason. Parents encourage you to change because they don't want their sons to end up bad. So, that what I think of people that try to encourage you.

I think what would help you to change is to go to a program where other people are trying to change, too. Right here in Hillcrest you realize what the stupid things you did in your life. You remember what you have outside, especially your family.

-Uriel

From The Beat: We think you're right about family wanting you to change so you won't have to shed even more tears for being locked up! We also agree that it helps to change when you are with a group of people all dedicated to making the same changes you want to make. Have you found such a program? Can you? What kind of change is your family encouraging you to make? Are you going to disappoint them?

Keep It Coo'

This is another juvenile writin' to you from San Mateo. I'm writing to let you know to keep it coo', do your time. But if that don't work out, do what you gotta do.

I'm from Redwood City, and I do what I wanna do, even though it usually gets me into problems. But that's part of my lifestyle so you know what I mean late.

-Cachetes

From The Beat: We're not sure we know what you mean... Do you mean that what you want to do includes being locked up here since you have enough experience to know the consequences of your actions? If that's the case — if you want to be here in juvenile hall — then you're already doing what you need to do to satisfy that desire...

I Blew It

I have taken my mom for granted. She has always been there for me no matter what I have done. She is always proud of me when I do good or if I do bad. I have taken her bein' there for me for granted because every time I come back here, she can't bail me out.

And when I am also in here, I start to think about her and how she was always there to take care of me. When I get out here I'm going to appreciate my mom a lot more because she deserves it for all she has done for me.

To all The Beat readers, when you get out appreciate your mom 'cause you only get one in this lifetime... and you may never know when she will be gone from your life.

Much luv and respect.

-Brown Eyes

From The Beat: Of course your mother has stood by you. That's what the unconditional love of a mother for her child requires. So tell us, how will you show your new appreciation for your mother when you get home? You've put many things ahead of your mother up to now, so what will you change? What will you do differently? What will you stop doing?

I Blew It

I didn't just take advantage of the things I had, I forgot how good it was and didn't appreciate the things I had. Probably because my brain was so cloudy from the chronic smoke. But in a way I guess you could say this is a good experience because if I wasn't stopped now, then things would have gotten worse and I would have been going going back to county.

When I get out, I don't wanna drink, smoke or thizz. I just wanna be coo' and chill, get a job, make some money, go to college meet up with some hunnies, but do it the right way and not chronic blowin' because it blows my mind. I want to appreciate all the small thangs in life and do good because it's all good now. I just wanna be free, and do good things! Like help my mom, get my license.

-Bugs Money

From The Beat: We love the goals you have set for yourself — help your mom and get your license. But what led you to wanting to change? Is it the pain of being taken from your family, or the new ability to reason and analyze, free of brain-distorting chemicals? Whatever got you there, don't go back!

Change

When somebody tells me to change, I just don't listen. But when I try to listen, I try my best to change. But there's nothing that is going to make me change how I am.

I always mess up. I get in problems everywhere I go. I think I can't change how I am because I was raised to be how I am. Basically, I just care about me and my family too, and I don't care about no one else.

Sometimes I feel like I have to change, but that's only when I locked up in here because when I am here, it gets me thinking. But once I get out, all what I think about in the hall is forgotten.

I been in and out for more than about fifteen times. I'm tired of it. I hope I don't come back after I get out until next time. Late Beat.

-Kiko

From The Beat: Kiko, how can you know that nothing will make you change? It's like saying you already know the future, like you have ESP. The BEST thing about being human is that, no matter how we were raised, we get to make our own choices about how we want to carry ourselves, what our goals are, how we achieve them, etc. It's not what your parents chose for you (or your homies or the streets) that matters, it's your choices and your decisions.

Rest In Peace

Aqui estoy (I am here) thinking about our carnalito. Every time you cross my mind tu sabes que me aquito. I remember when we used to kick back and hella blast. It's hard to believe now it's back in the past. I remember those times like if it was yesterday. Rest in peace in da heaven up above. Dose who left behind, that ones dat have nothing but love.

If we could only take back time back in the days when you were here with us. Sometimes I sit back at the living room checking out your pictures, listenin' to some oldies, to da ones you like... It takes me back in da days when you were here with us. Now a firme brother and a son is lost.

Your kids are growing up and they ask for you bro. We say you in da sky looking down at them. They stare at one another like they don't understand. Damn carnal, if we could only go back to da days when you were here with us...

This on memory of my brother that feel so wonderful. Rest in peace. Rest in peace...

-Shy Girl

From The Beat: The tragedies that we read about week in and week out sometimes make us wonder what country we are living in! All we can say to you is that the memories you have of your brother will keep him alive for as long as you live. So look at your life, and see what you must change to assure that you live and long, long time. You owe him nothing less.

Women

Women are really confusing
They have you feeling like a winner
But really you're losing
Now it's real hard for me to trust
But for some reason my heart thirst
For love
But my mind tells me don't rush
But she so beautiful and I love when she blush
Still I have no kind of trust
I think it's because I've been hurt
Fell in love and she stomped my face in the dirt
But that's what I get for being a flirt
Sometimes I don't understand
Because really I'm a handsome young man
And always try to do the best I can
Truthfully I think I deserve a beautiful smart young lady
And if I knew she was true
That would drive me crazy
But that is what I crave for
And soon this lucky young woman would walk through the door
And I think I would cry
The little birds in my head would fly
And hopefully I would be in her heart forever even when I die.

-Anonymous

From The Beat: We don't know who wrote this "I'm dying for love" poem, but we do know that when he finds the object of his desires, he will always have a special gift to give: a beautiful "I have found love" poem.

You Hate On Me, I Hate On You

I'ma always keep it true. No matter where I go, I remained the same. I'll never change my way... I'm always keeping it true. You hate on me, I'ma hate on you is all I gotta do...

I'ma always keep it true no matter where I go. You hate on me, I'ma hate on you is all I gotta do. I thought I'll let you know, no matter where I go I always keep it true.

-Shy Girl

From The Beat: When you say, "I'll never change my way," you reveal just how very young you are. Change is a given. It happens to all of us, whether we want it or not. The only thing to be determines is whether that change will come about because you want it to and make it happen, or will come about over your objections and imposed on you by others (like the system). When you gain some maturity, you will see that these are your only choices. Now, let's talk about "keeping it true." True to what? True to whom? Have you ever heard of a person named Jesus? He called for a change in the way you think ("you hate on me, I'ma hate on you"). He said, "Love your enemies." "Turn the other cheek." "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." Do you believe anything that He said?

The Get Down

November 30, 2006, 5:15 pm, I walked into my room for just a quick second. Then I heard a loud, deep voice, "Who else is home?"

My mother responded, "My son, my daughter, and my mother." I stepped out to my hallway to see what was happening.

Six police officers took me in to Daly City, Ca police station. About an hour later, I saw my best friend. We were in handcuffs inside the detectives' office. We didn't say anything that coulda gotten us into more heat. There was a surveillance camera watching us.

We then got to talk to the detective. He asked us questions about a former case. We were stupid and admitted some parts of the case, but everything else we denied. When the officer left, my best friend and I were talking... We were shocked, worried, confused, and mostly scared. We didn't want to get locked up, but it wasn't up to us.

At 11:30 pm, we were taken off to Hillcrest and booked in. That was the last time I saw my best friend. We went to court. It didn't look that well for either of us, and now we will miss Christmas and maybe even New Years...

Man, I miss my friends, girlfriend, loved ones, and most importantly my family. And now our freedom is being decided by a man or a woman in a black robe.

-Diskoolguy

From The Beat: The part that's missing from this is your own responsibility for giving to that man or woman in the black robe power over your future. If you were "stupid" for admitting some parts of the case, what were you for doing the things that became the case? Anyone who can write as well as you, with such clarity and descriptive power, has many more choices than a lot of others who are not so gifted. But such "gifts" can also be curses if they lead you to think you can avoid the consequences of your action. We're sure you already know this, but you MUST get all the formal education you can, taking you to entirely new and different mountains to climb, and to conquer.

I Wish

I wish I would have listened to my parents, because I wouldn't be locked up. Since I locked up now, I miss my bed, my room and my family and girlfriend, and I can't spend no more time with them because I'm in Juvenile hall. I regret everything that got me here so I wish I could've listened to my parents.

-Cris

From The Beat: When you say you regret everything that got you here, we assume you mean that you are going to do some things differently when you get out. Tell us what you plan to sacrifice for the sake of your future and your freedom.

Your kids are growing up and they ask for you bro. We say you in da sky looking down at them. They stare at one another like they don't understand.

In Deep Thought

Chale, I don't know what to do. Yesterday I called my jefa (mom) to check como andan las cosas en la cantona (how things are going at home). She told me dat my carnalito (brother) walks now, and that he's bald headed too. That makes me happy por que yo siempre quería verlo asi (because I always wanted to see him like that).

I miss you angel. You're always en mi mente (on my mind) day and night... She also told me that she was going to Chicago, y eso me aguito machisimo (and that depressed me badly). She ain't gonna wait for me. Se pasa q-no? (She's doing too much. Isn't she?) I guess I deserve that.

I don't know what 2 do. I think I'ma be doing the things I used 2 do when I get out 'cause my jefa ya no va estar aqui conmigo (mother isn no longer going to be with me). I'm scared. I don't want 2 get locked up again. That's if I get out in the middle of this month.

Chales, que vida homies tener que pasar por estas cosas, q-no? (Damn, what a life and the things we have to go through, right)? Anyways, I'ma keep going with my life 'cause I know I could do anything without my jefa.

We use 2 kick it, blaze it every single weekend. Eramos inseparables (We were inseparable). We were so close.

I still remember esos días cuando la kikiabamos en las calles con los homies (those days when we used to kick it in the streets with the homies). When we used to smoke weed, we used to laugh hella. Damn Giggles if you could come back 2 California y me perdonaras por haberte hecho lo que hice. La neta no fue mi intención homegirl hacerte eso. (and forgive me for what I did to you. The truth is that it wasn't my intention to do that to you). Even though los homies piensan dat yo te heche rata, pero no fue asi girl. Fue por tu bien y tu con el tiempo lo entenderas q-no? (Even though the homies think I snitched on you, it wasn't like that. It was for your own good and with time day, will understand why I did what I did, right)?

Shhh I know I did something firme (good) for my homegirl 'cause right now probably you would be dead or would be kikiandola con los homies y fumando (kicking it with the homies and smoking). I feel firme for what I did, but I miss you Giggles. You would always be my homegirl no matter what. Well I'm out. Al ratos (I'll holla at y'all later).

-Shy Girl, San Mateo

From The Beat: To whom did you share what your homegirl was doing? Her parents? The authorities? It's unfortunate that your mother moved away, but she is a human being, too. There's only so much a person can take. If someone tries to help out another person but that person continues to do the things that they do, the person who is trying to help is eventually going to get fed up because what's the point of helping someone who isn't trying to help themselves? We hope you get the opportunity to be reunited with your mother. However, if you do, do everything that she asks of you because if you don't, what's the point of being with her?

Still I have no kind of trust
I think it's because I've been hurt
Fell in love and she stomped my face in the dirt

La Regastes

Chale, ahora que estoy encerrado, me di cuenta que la estoy regando y que la rege bien mechin. Neta, right now estubiera en la calle con mis hommies fumando y haciendo desmadres. Estoy desaprovechando todo. Me dolio, serio pedo. Extraño a las calles. Imaginate todo lo que estubiera haciendo, pero ni modo. Ya estoy en la torcida.

From The Beat: A lo mejor fue lo mejor haber caído aqui, porque quien sabe donde estubieras en estos momentos. ¿Te has dado cuenta de la cantidad de personas que han muerto a causa de las pandillas, de andar con los "homies en lugares peligrosos? Son muchos. Deberías de usar este tiempo para pensar en las cosas que estas haciendo antes que termines en una posición que no puedas salir.

You Messed Up

Damn, now that I am locked up, I realized that I am messing up and that I screwed up big time. The truth is that right now, I would have been out on the streets with my homies, smoking, and doing bad things. I am not taking advantage of everything. It hurt me, real talk. I miss the streets. Imagine everything I would be doing, but, oh well. I am already behind bars.

-Shy Girl, San Mateo

From The Beat: Maybe it was for the best that you find yourself where you are because who knows where you would be during these moments. Have you ever realized the amount of people who have died due to gangs and for being with the homies in dangerous places? It is plenty. You should use this time to think about the things that you are doing before you find yourself in a position that you can't get out of.

Lo Que Siempre He Querido Saber

Siempre he querido saber sobre como mi familia se destruyo poquito a poquito. Primero, se yeban a mi hermano, luego fallece mi primo hermano, luego mi padre lo encerraron por unas estupideces yespues me separaron de mi hermano cuando mi jefa más los necesitaba. No pierdo las esperanzas de que un día me vayan a dejar salir.

From The Beat: La vida no es sólo gozo, trae muchas cosas que duelen y cosas que hacen reir. Sentimos mucho las perdidas y las malas situaciones que has tenido que enfrentar. Ten paciencia porque las cosas pueden mejorar y para que eso pase, tienes que poner mucho de tu parte.

What I Have Always Wanted To Know

I have always wanted to know about how my family destroyed itself, little by little. First, they take my brother, then my first brother dies, and later on, they lock up my father over some stupid stuff. Then, they separated me from my mother when my mother needed us the most. I don't lose the hope that one day, they're going to let me out.

-Maniac, San Mateo

From The Beat: Life is not just all about joy; life comes with many things that hurt and things that make us laugh. We deeply regret about the losses and the bad situation that you have had to encounter. Have patience because things can improve and in order for that to happen, you have to put a lot of effort on your end.

Disconnected

I feel disconnected when I am not with my family. I feel disconnected when I am by myself. I feel disconnected when I am not with my boyfriend.

I feel disconnected when my cousin raped me. I disconnected myself from him. After all that happened I disconnected myself from my dad and many of my brothers and sisters. I only keep to my number one sister Miranda and to my boyfriend and my family I lived with.

-Leandra

From The Beat: We sure weren't expecting that terrible event that begins your second paragraph. We're not sure why you separated yourself from your dad and most of your siblings because your cousin raped you. Is it because they didn't believe you? Have you told anyone else about this? We think your cousin needs help before some other young girl experiences what you've experienced. We hope you have adults in your life (Counselors? Psychologists? Teachers? Friends?) that you can talk to about this. Talking can help. So can writing. Thank you for sharing this deeply painful memory.

Separado Por Un Rato

¿Por qué es que pasa todo esto?

¿Será porque cuando llegas a este sistema, tan culero, que te trata como un perro cayejero, que te destruye y te separa de lo que más amas, te destruye la vida.

Sin embargo hay algunos que te quitan a los que trabajan por lo suyo y todo por las malditas drogas, las cuales destruyen a uno sin conocer su futuro.

Los que escuchan esto, les entra por la derecha y les sale por la izquierda porque no les importa. Lo que más les importa es solo lo suyo. So pase lo que pase, sólo preocupate por lo tuyo.

From The Beat: Pues creemos que lo mejor es buscar la manera como alejarse de las negatividades para no terminar en lugares como estos. Esperamos que escuchen tu consejo al igual que deseamos que tú sigas el tuyo. Gracias amigo!

Separated For A Minute

Why is it that all of this happens? Could it be because when you arrive in this system, so messed up, that treats you like a street dog, that destroys you, and separates you from the people that you love, and destroys your life? Regardless, there are some that take what you worked for, for themselves and all because of the goddamn drugs, which destroy a person, without knowing their future.

For those who hear this, it comes in through the right and it leaves through the left ear because they don't care. What they care about the most is just themselves, so, regardless of what happens, just worry about yours.

-Maniac, San Mateo

From The Beat: Well, we believe that the best thing to do is find the way to distance yourself from the negative things so you don't end up in places like this one. We hope that others hear your words of advice, and at the same time, we hope you follow your own words of advice. Thanks, friend!

All Out The Door

I have taken many things for granted
-Family
-Freedom
-Friends
-Life in general

I had it all, a nice house, a loving family and my freedom. But what do I have now? Life, but not the same as it used to be. Now I'm sitting in a cell wit' someone else shoes an' drawers waitin' for my next court date to get my freedom back.

I tell myself this ain't bad in here and it ain't shhh but daycare. But compared to my life on the outs, this is hell. I gambled with everything I lived for and lost, and as the consequence I end up here. I blew it and now I pay.

-Cook

From The Beat: If you gambled all that on some selfish need, then indeed, you did blow it. But you haven't "ended up" here because you are still traveling. This is a stop along the way, and it's the kind of stop that gives you time to think about the road that got you here and the road you hope to travel from here. This "hell" you're experiencing is little more than a sting compared what lies down the road you've been on. Time for a course correction.

I had it all, a nice house, a loving family and my freedom.

My Grandma Inspires Me Most

The person who inspires me the most is my grandma because of two main reasons, she's smart and she's happy. She is such a caring person and always seems to smile at the end of that dank day.

If you truly have a problem or just feel bad, and you need some inspiration, she is the person to see for the happiness. If it weren't for my grandmother, I could honestly say that I would be shot dead or in a gang somewhere.

I love her so much to be a failure and choose the dumb things in life, like being in gang or using drugs isn't a option for me, because if it were, I would be breaking my grandmother's heart, and I will never do that.

So the only option I have now is to be successful and maintain a good and honest life, and love life for what it is. My grandmother is my role model because she's an old G and got the knowledge and strength you and me wish to have. That's who inspires me the most my grandma.

-DJ Hooh

From The Beat: You're very lucky to have your grandmother in your life, but she's very lucky to have you, too. She sees your potential and wants you to reach it. You see that she has only love for you, and know that you owe her a lot, and now it's time to give back. We hope you show this piece to her. We know it will make her happy.

Mind Your Own Business

People always telling me I should change my life, but they don't know anything about me or my life, so they shouldn't tell me nothing and mind they own business.

-Marckys

From The Beat: So, you're telling people whose lives you know nothing about to mind their own business because they don't know anything about your life? Isn't that rather hypocritical? What is the motive for these people telling you to change? What's in it for them?

What Is Your Way Out?

Well my friend is going to do life for some shhh he did and he regrets it because when he sent me a letter he told me how he feels in there. Even if my friend's in there because of what he did, he feel like an animal behind those bar's sometimes—he said that he is going crazy in there.

-Carlos

From The Beat: There's no way for those of us who have never served real time in prison to understand the things that it does to a person to be locked up in such a final and degrading way. The desperation of such a situation could surely make someone lose their grip on reality and on the controls of their mind—it's one of the big flaws with the idea that some people hold, that prison serves to rehabilitate and released inmates come out ready to be law abiding citizens. When someone sees the ugly underbelly of the law, what would make them want to abide by it? But there are those who see it and come out ready to work for change—to make their own lives stand for something different and maybe even to help others avoid what they have had to endure. We think what makes those people different is the strength and will of their spirit, and though it seems as though your friend might not get that chance, we hope that you will take yours when you can.

Rap Career On Hold

When I was out, I was doing good. I was doing good in school and I was just about to get signed to Sick Wit' It records for a two-year contract, but I didn't go to school one day because I had some really important studio time to get done. My PO hated on me and violated me as soon as she found out I cut school that day.

Now I'm getting sent to a group home somewhere far out, and my dreams are on hold for a while. But I'm gonna bounce back ten times harder than before, holla.

-Toret the Great

From The Beat: Here's the thing about that: there is a very fine line between prison, death and gangster rapping. The allure of fame is great, but as you have found, it's not always worth it. Not to mention most famous people aren't really that cool. Where there isn't a fine line, is between education, real job, and a real life. These are things that can be sustained. Rapping, one minute you're on the high, next your on the low and locked up. Your choice young man.

What is your way out?

My way out is to just not hang with people that are in that path (bad path). I don't gang bang I'm not a hustler, I do be on the streets a lot but I don't do harm to people. My way out is not to hang out with people that are walking in bad footsteps. Like I said I'm not a criminal.

-Positive Steps

From The Beat: Keep up the good work in that case! What about others around you that you care about? Are they caught up in the game? Is there any way you can show them that would help them move away from that lifestyle to a safer one?

The mind of a menace

The mind of a menace is cold blooded. A menace just doesn't give a damn about anything

-Lil' Dedo

From The Beat: Someone who doesn't give a damn about anything for real is a sociopath. A sociopath is defined as a person with a psychopathic personality, whose behavior is antisocial and who lacks a sense of moral responsibility or social conscience. But we believe some people pretend to not care about anything or anyone because they've had it so hard and figure they have nothing to lose.

Forgetting About God

To me it is no way out because once you in it's no way out some people think it is but like I said if you start selling drugs you like the money you going to want more and more and then you start robbing people then when you go to jail you want to pray to God that you get out then when you get out you just forget about God.

-Thinkin'

From The Beat: These are some really astute observations. You sound like an intelligent person, so will you be different? Will you remember God or whomever it was you made your promises to?

Wanted Man

When my PO wanted me for running from camp. That day was ugly because me and my friend left the camp and I was wanted for a warrant. I was out for a year. I tried the best I could to stay out of trouble and it was working for a long time but I got arrested for some guns.

-Lil' Sammie

From The Beat: Was carrying guns actually trying the best you could? Come on! If you said you had one gun for protection, you're still very wrong, but you're packing multiple weapons, we can only guess that it was not for your personal or the greater good. Get your head screwed on straight so you can see what's obvious to the rest of the world.

What's Cold?

When you need somebody 'cause you in jail and they turn yo' back. But when I get out, they askin' you for stuff and you give it to them just 'cause you feelin' bad for them just because you have it to give. That's what they think but you really have it to give.

-Anonymous

From The Beat: Well, you didn't do the wrong thing. Sometimes people are small minded and selfish, but that doesn't mean that you need to be small too. If you keep doing the right thing, your positivity will spread around you and you won't be affected by the smallness of others, even if they're hanging on you.

My Cold

What's cold when the police pepper sprayed me?
What's cold when I got shot?
What's cold when this set me up?

-Cold one

From The Beat: These things are terribly cold. Makes you shiver inside. Will you be able to find a way to thaw what society has done to ice you down?

Feeling Wanted?

Last time I felt wanted was when I cut off my ankle monitor because of my brother, we were arguing and I got upset he was telling me all these things that really got to my head, I ended up cutting it off and leaving, after that I felt wanted.

-Young Brother

From The Beat: Do you mean wanted by the police? That's definitely not the best kind of wanted in this world. Ankle monitors are clearly a tough thing to handle, it makes you feel trapped, yet you're so close to freedom. The problem is you are comparing it to being on the outs and not having an EM. If you compared it to being locked up, you might see that it's not worth cutting it off. We're not saying we agree with it as a form of punishment, but it's what the system has in place. Your goal should be to follow the rules and get out of the damn system!

The Judge's Cold

What cold to me is I think the judge is givin' me sixteen more days on a misdemeanor and a felony charge after I've already done eleven days. I personally think that's cold.

-Charles

From The Beat: The justice system is cold, use this hard experience as a lesson to better your life. Stay away from it! Be safe.

My Life

How I came this way today, because I never really had nothing. Everything I wanted I had to either take it or grind for it. My parents try to do the best they can but after a certain age they couldn't afford a lot of stuff that I wanted so I had to take it from people to get what I wanted, but if I could start all over I probably would regret things that I've done. Not because you got to eat some way you feel me. Peace out Beat.

-Lil' Bezzol

From The Beat: Well, there's a big difference between stealing your dinner because you need to eat and stealing a pair of sneakers or someone's bike because it's something that you want. Material things are easy to covet and think we can't live without, but we can't just take what we want all the time without earning it.

I Ain't Trippin'

What's up Beat! This ya boy, Lil' Glen, still in these played out halls disrespecting, ya feel me? The group home refused me but I ain't tripping. I'm a lion, feel me? I'm just tryna get where I'm going so I can pimp it. Whatever happens, I ain't tripping. So to all, getting your money, I'll be there in a minute.

-Lil' Glen

From The Beat: Oh man, you are in bad shape. You've got the illness. You know, whenever someone protests too much (and we cut out a good chunk too), it makes others suspicious. When you have to repeat how you ain't tripping 15 times, it kinda puts it in our mind that you are trippin'. But you know what else? It's okay to trip on being locked up, getting sent to a group home, pimpin the young women in your community (who you should be respecting and holding up), selling drugs to young brothers in your community, carring guns, getting shot at. THESE ARE ALL THINGS YOU SHOULD BE TRIPPING ON. Wake up young brother, and know where you're at in the world, because you're community is in a bad place and ain't no one gonna help you all except yourselves. What are you going to do about that? Stop being the fool!

What's cold?

The streets is so cold that there is no way out if you is true to the game. When you have a clique and you put in a lot of work its hard to get out of it. If you want to get out you probably have to take a bullet or get jumped out or something.

-Jakari

From The Beat: This is the biggest difficulty for you youngsters and for the people that want to help you. As soon as you decide you want to do your own thing and not follow the herd blindly, be your own man, your own friends/family is on you like you're their enemy. And we all know that it's no joke what they'll do. Can you think in your mind about people you know who have gotten out non-violently? What have they done? Have they had a kid and just layed low? Have they left the scene and just disappeared. What are your options? Can you think outside of the box you've been locked up in for so long? ...And we're not talking about the hall.

Free

They always saying that nobody can't stop from getting out of the gang banging, but that not true because I got out of it and I feel that it's something good. I'm doing good now.

-Scarry

From The Beat: That's wonderful. Next time, can you tell us how you got out so you can inspire other youngsters? They need role models like yourself, and they need to understand the highs and lows of what it is to get out.

Locked Up On Christmas Day!

For me spending Christmas in Juvenile hall is hell! Because I am spending an important holiday in jail! That's not the way God wants his holiday to be remembered. It is so stressful to not be able to spend this holiday of life with my beloved one's such as my family right now.

I think it just sucks for me just because I'm locked up but I have realized that it has affected others also! Such as my mother in my point of view she has been scared because of my actions! She has to remember all her life that I was in jail on Christmas day! My mother has no one to spend Christmas with. All my brothers and sister are locked up or have abandoned her! I am the only one she has left! And I'm locked up! So now she has that in her memory forever!

God never said life was going to be easy. He only said it will be worth it! So now it's up to me to turn my life around and make sure my ass is right next to my one and only mother every holiday. So I guess it's painful to remember!

-Lil' Mousie

From The Beat: You don't like being locked up for the holiday or any day for that matter, so what will you do to get yourself free? It's not about God, it's about you and making better choices. What actions must you address? Why did it come to this to wake up and think of your mom and her pain? Were you thinking of her when you were free ripping and running? We hope you are home with family next Christmas!

Good Question

What's your way out? Funny you ask. I ask myself that all the time. Maybe I can't get out. Where I'm from you don't really think about that, but in a place like this I guess you have a lot of time to.

I rap and I've been doing it for a long time ever since I was nine years old. I'm sixteen now. I see rapping as a way for me to get out. It takes me away from all the shhh that goes on in my life and keeps me out of the street.

-Koran

From The Beat: Music has long been a way for people to create something that can change their circumstances and improve their community. We wish you luck in that tradition, but do not lose focus on school!

My Way Out?

My way out of all the bad I'm doing is to go to church. Another way out of the crazy life style I'm living is my love for others. Like my love for my parents is much stronger than hating come here. I just need to channel my energy somewhere else like boxing and art.

-Change up

From The Beat: Good for you in recognizing the problem, now the hard part is staying true to your words, but it can be done. Best to you!

What Is Your Way Out?

Ok where do I start I'm a rapper. I'm very good at what I do and rapping is what I do best. Education is first outside of rapping. I plan on finishing high school. I hope I get rich before 18. Turf stars look for me out here.

-Jarret

From The Beat: How are you gonna finish high school if you're out there trying to get rich?

Feeling Wanted

I don't think I ever felt wanted but I did have some problems with some people but we did get over that.

-Illegible

From The Beat: We think you might have this backwards. Being wanted is a positive thing. It's about being loved, nit being chased.

Last Time I Felt Wanted

The last time I really felt wanted was when I talked to my family and they tried their best to comfort me and tell me I'm comin' home to them very soon and I felt that I was loved and wanted that day.

-Charles

From The Beat: We hope you feel that again soon!

Spending My Christmas In Jail!

First I want to say sorry to you!
I wish I didn't do what I do!
Because if didn't I'd probably be spending my Christmas right next to you.
Now I'm sitting this Juvenile Hall full of regrets!
I thought I was thinking of you when I got your name tattooed on my neck.
But it turns out I wasn't, I should have thought of you before I ran from that group home!
Now you're sitting in the living room decorating that Christmas tree all on your own!
You are used to having me right by your side like a right hand man!
But I was growing up you stayed the same and that was something we both couldn't stand. Now we're a holiday apart I'm gonna say I love you mother, sorry I wasn't home for Christmas Day!

-Lil' Mousie

From The Beat: We hope you share this copy of The Beat with your mom so she can see this beautiful poem you've written for her.

Come and Go

What's up, Beat Within! I'm Tonto, right here in 150 max'! Just postin', doin' the little time I gotta do. I'm in here for something I didn't do, but I ain't trippin', just ridin' it out.

I'm new to the system, but I'm gettin' it down. I won't be around for long. Coming this twenty-first, I'm gone — back on the block is where I'll be, in the streets of the hood. Well, I ain't got much to say. So until that day, I'm here to stay.

-Tonto

From The Beat: You're new to our pages, too, so how could you know we don't print turf calls or gang slogans (even disguised in rhymes or set phrases). So, you'll see them missing from your piece. Aside from that, we just have to say, if you go right back to the same street that got you here on a false charge, you're going right back to putting your life and your freedom at risk. Go to school, get a job, or bang your mob one day in a penitentiary, putting in work and doing dirt far from any varrio street. No diss, but this is your best chance to take another track and never come back.

Be Safe

this is to all
who is about to get out
be safe in them streets
'cause it ain't cool right now
i feel that a lot is
about to go down
be safe and stay up

-Ray-Ray

From The Beat: The best way to be safe, on the real, is to graduate from the street and get paid legal. It's better than a bullet-proof vest to have nobody pumping bullets at your chest or hunting for your head. Get a legal job to make your pay and go to bed (your own, at home) at the end of the day.

Another Way

My way out is to stop selling weed and go to work!!! Taking care of my business. I wanna do construction. You ge paid good!

That's about it though. One thing I don't wanna do is come back to the hall. This not the place to be. That's real.

-Illegible

From The Beat: You got that one right. And construction is definitely a good job that pays well. Do it if you can!

The Way Out

What it do Beat. This is Lil' Box from Hayward and I just want to just say what's up. I'm just waiting to go to camp. When I go to camp I am going to pimp that so I can go back to them streets of Hayward but eff it because everything happens for a reason so that's it, to all be safe and get out.

-Lil' Box

From The Beat: How do you know everything happens for a reason? Where do you get that faith? We're glad you can see this struggle with some perspective and hope you do your camp program so you can get out and we suppose come back to juvenile, given all that matters to you is your homies.

Live Right

This is Lil' Mousie from Livermore! To me I can't figure out how to live right!

What's the right way to live! Some say gangs, drugs, destroy the world! But (most) gangs don't do nothing but help the community! If they have the structure for it to be run right!

Nowadays most youngstas make us all look bad! Such as doing drive by's: get out of the damn car and stop being scary and defend your lifestyle toe to toe!

Some say all us are brown and have pride in being brown! So why do we kill each other? Some say why don't we come together as one raza why is it one gang or the other?! We are all brown and have pride but some believe in a strong cause and until the other side can learn to respect it!

-Lil' Mousie

From The Beat: Explain to The Beat more about how gangs help the community with their drugs, guns and violence? And how one gang can have a stronger cause than the other, while they both continue to ruin their families while putting each other if not themselves in prisons or in the dirt -RIP? You have plenty to learn, and if you are not about making the community a better place for all, then you are apart of the genocide of young Latino males. We hope you wake up before it's way late for you.

My Family

My way out to me is my relationship to all my family! You see I love all my family very much and want to re-earn their respects for previous stuff I've done to them. "Burning bridges" is what they called it!

-Charles

From The Beat: Your family loves you and will forgive you if you are genuinely honest with them, and show how much you care. Good luck!

Group Home Good News!

This Lil' Mousie from Livermore! I just got some lightweight good news. I talked to my PO and he said he's going to see if I can go back to my group home I ran from! So we'll see what's crackin'!

-Lil' Mousie

From The Beat: We hope it's true, if that will make you happy. Do you also believe you will be able tot do your program successfully? What will be so different the second go round?

In The Hall

This is Danger
Christmas in the hall is hella lame
because instead of decorating your own house with your family,
you're decorating a place that's not even yours.
Instead of spending Christmas with your family
you're spending Christmas with people you don't even know.
And you don't even get your traditional food that you like.
That's how I feel spending Christmas in the hall.

-Danger

From The Beat: We hope your family visited you on Christmas, so at least you got a little traditional feeling. And we hope next year you are home with them! What will that take on your part?

Last Time I Felt Wanted

The last time I felt wanted is when my granny pleaded to the judge to let me go home with her in her custody. And I felt like I wanted to cry in the courtroom.

My dad didn't want me to come home. I was kinda sad, but I got over that, 'cause I don't want to be with nobody who don't want me around.

-Kevin

From The Beat: You're so lucky to have your granny. It hurts so much to have a father who doesn't want you at home. Why do you suppose he doesn't want you home? We hope your granny's love can heal all that hurt and you can prove to yourself and others that you belong free. Don't blow it where you will hear your father say, "I told you so."

Life Is Cold

What it do, mang! This yo' boy Lil' Troublesum from Hayward comin' at y'all from this place. What's cold? Life is cold. Everything about it is messed up!

Families be strugglin' to survive, and youngstas do what they gotta do in order to achieve their goals. Something goes wrong, and we end up in jail, just because we tryin' to take care of our loved ones!

And when you're in jail for a long period of time, people you consider loved ones, give you the "cold" shoulder and just forget you ever existed. You try to say, "Screw it!" but you catch yourself thinkin' about 'em and why they went bad on you.

I look at it like this: You take a loss and deal wit' it. Ain't nothin' you can do about it. Mofo's should what goes around, comes around. Let that be the reason. One love. (Forget the year 2007!)

-Lil' Juanito

From The Beat: We've (kinda sorta) known each other a long time — way too long for a young man to be locked down! We remember when you were in Camp, and we hoped you'd never come back to the Hall. We truly respect the strength of character you've continued to show, even if we wish you'd found another way to deal with it when you were on the other side of these walls. The thing about those phrases like, "What goes around, comes around!" is that they can get twisted to mean whatever you want to imagine — and it's still probably true. Revenge, for example, is like a wheel that just keeps turning, killing rivals and homeboys alike. If only you were a little less afraid of appearing to be soft, you might have seen other options for how to live your life that would have come around with blessings instead of strife. The truth is, you can still make that choice, 'cause living in anger and hate will just bring more of the same old noise that has brought this fate. Much love and respect to a hardhead in pain. Remember though, it's never too late for change, but we'll also assume that you are fine as you are, despite where you sit tonight.

Not Sure Of A Way Out

I think my way out of the life I live, it has to have something to do with a lot of money, respect and love. I say that because that's what the life I live is about nowadays. I spend my time doing the things above because that's what the life I live is about nowadays.

I spend my time doing the things above because that's what I grow up around and I got family and friends that keep me living this way. But, I ain't going to blame them for what I do and how I live because I make decisions for myself and other people too sometimes. I make decisions for them like I'll make for myself, but that's only for my family and friends, somebody I don't like I'll make their life effed up if I make a decision for them.

The last time I felt wanted was when I had a Buick Le Sabre. The police tried to pull me over every time they saw me driving, but I always got away so they couldn't tow my car. In my life I make money, buy cars, clothes, get beezies and live my life. Oh yeah in my life it goes down, big time. Moneymaker.

-Terrence

From The Beat: There's wanted by the police, but then there's wanted by regular people. When was the last time you felt like an important part of someone's life? Like, a time when your mom made your favorite meal, or when a friend went out of his way to help you, or when a girl told you she loved you? What about that kind of wanted? As for your hunger for money, well the way you think of having money will only continue to keep you down. You'll never get out of the system or living in fear, and in the end you will have nothing, zero.

You

i see you wearin' that blue shirt
i'm sure you hate
behind that gate
but every time i see your face
i pray
i see you throw out the trash
almost every single day
around eight
my room's straight ahead
if you look close you can see my face
as i see you put the laundry away
you must have a lot of sad days
sometimes i wish you and me
could get together and run away
i must say that would be a good day
but until then we can only pray
keep yo' head up

-Jen

From The Beat: You need to plan a better day than living life on the run thinking that will free you from where you are and what you've done. That's a fool's paradise, Jen. We shouldn't have to remind you again. How many are dead or locked away for years 'cause they couldn't stay clear on the concept that it's time to do your program, pay your debt, change your life on the outside and get on with it? Yesterday may be beautiful in your memory, but try to live it again and tomorrow will be ugly as sin. It's time to do right if you want to live your life free — that goes for you and the boy you see too, even if he's facing years (he needs to use them or lose his future freedom through them).

Say "No" To Get Out

My way out of street life, criminal, and justice system is to do good in here and try to get of here. When I'm out of here I'll just go to all my court dates and do what it takes to be off probation. Also I need to refuse to do stuff that will get me back here, stay away from the street and not hang around criminals.

-Zuko

From The Beat: What is going to be the biggest challenge you face? How easy or hard is it going to be to refuse that stuff? Keep writing!

Mucho Free-Yo!

this is sav' sassy
puttin' it down fo' sure tho'
being locked up — that's cold
pretty fast it gets so old
i hate it in here, just like everyone
in my room to all the others going dumb
or washing some dishes
thinking of your wishes
i get out soon and walk free
and go to your home wherever that be
in here reading books and watching movies
instead of being out and smashin' in hoopties
i hate wearing pink and blue
walking to and from school
looking like that "pink ladies" crew
can't wait to go home
when i can shower alone
and walk around, free to roam

-Sav' Sassy

From The Beat: Getting out is only half the battle, 'cause staying out is where it's at. Smashin' in hoopties flossin' like a sav' is not likely to keep you out on the street, road or av'. If you really hate it in here, get clear on what you need to do stay home free — actin' a foo' rolling with your crew putting it down, is a sure-fire way to reclaim yo' incarcerated frown.

This Is It

i'm in here for a case
a' it like that so
screw "have a nice day"
but look i ain't finish'
so do like rick ross said
and push it to the limits
i'm doin' it like baseball
takin' it to nine innings
y'i'nsayin' y'i'nsayin' y'i'nsayin'

-Lil' Man

From The Beat: Of all that you wrote, this is what we could print, and it's pretty darn good. But the rest of the words you put on the page comin' out the 'hood, need to be buried or cremated; they should, 'cause they perpetuate nothing but pain, disrespect and bloodshed in a nation of ghetto youth that's seen enough death.

Cold

it's cold on the block
but i'm still sellin' rocks
it's cold on the block

-Lil' Ronie

From The Beat: We cut your RIP, 'cause you've got to write a piece about him, how you know him, who he is, why you miss him, how he died, etc. — to show proper respect. Also, if you bussin' yo' glock, you're part of the reason he got shot. Be part of the solution not part of the pollution on the block! Peace.

My Way Out

I don't want to get out.
I love this life I lead.
I'm having hella fun.
I guess I enjoy living for the moment.
I do regret not going to school, but oh well eff it.
I'm gonna just take it one day at a time.

-Young B

From The Beat: You call incarceration fun? It's all a part of the life you write about. We hope you realize that as fun as "the life" is, a free life is even more fun once you truly embrace it.

Regardless I'm Getting Out

I have many ways out but they all need motivation, determination, and a goal. My first way out of the game is if I have a good chance like if I am accepted to a college. My second way out is to get rich and be a mob boss. The other two ways are grim: the pen or dead. Which I don't plan on. Regardless of what happen I'm getting out.

-Garyn

From The Beat: We hope college pans out for you because being a mob boss isn't a safe strategy for avoiding the pen or getting killed.

A Day on the Block

an early monday
i step outside
and look to my left
and look to my right
walk down them sticky stair'
of my apartment
dopefeen joe ask'
"is the weather good"
so i told him to come back
and ask him "nickel or dime"
he gave me ten dollars
in nickels and dimes
i walked out seeing
the lil' beegees
goin' dumb in the stolo
camry on empty
step to the corner
and messing with the
lil' turf bops

-Tams-mils-stretch

From The Beat: Not sure we could read your name right, but that's our best guess. You know, we really think using names like bop, ripper, runner, ho, etc., to refer to any of the girls in your community is hella disrespectful, but more importantly, we feel that it leads directly to abusive treatment toward girls relegated by language to a secondary (not a "lady" worthy of respect) status – sometimes a sub-human status reminiscent of slave days where language relegated an entire race to being treated like animals (bought, sold, beaten). That said, we left the word this time because your little poem is such an elegant, accurate (and therefore disturbing) snapshot of life on the block. Every word and every observation carries a ton of weight. So do you want to be part of the solution or part of the pollution? Choose right, or we all pay the price!

Hard Christmas

I don't even want to think about Christmas. For me, when I get locked up, time on the outs just — stops.

I think it's kinda messed up that they put up decorations in our unit, because Christmas is time for family and love. In here, there is none of that!

This time it is especially messed up, because I will be in Santa Rita County Jail. I mean, I guess I will get through it, but right now I am having a hard time.

-Ted

From The Beat: You state your pain so clearly it's almost like the page is bleeding your words. We hope you get to see this piece in Rita and you both remember how you felt and feel some relief now that Christmas is past. Remember that family and love is not just Christmas time, but all year round — so show your family more love than you show the game that brought all this pain.

Life On a Home Pass

When I'm on a HV (home visit) at Camp, and ridin' around slappin' hella hard, drinkin' on some Remy Martin and Henny mix, callin' up hella females tryin' hook up, and lookin' for some parties and something to get into — I realize that nothing will be the same without my brother Mike Jonez out.

-Lil' Vee

From The Beat: For his sake and your own, you need to take a deeper look at this situation, and make some changes in your life. Drinking and driving may seem trivial to you (as long as you don't get caught), but you need to start making more responsible decisions — and it starts with the little things. Now you should see just how serious things can suddenly get with the life style you two were living. You got lucky and he didn't, but both of you need to decide to make better decisions, 'cause look at how it turned out (for him!), the life you've been livin'.

Happy New Year

What it do, Beat! This that homegirl Vianca from Hayward, droppin' a few lines. Wish you guys a Happy New Year's! To me, it's just another year wasted.

To all my loved ones: Don't do time behind walls! I just want to say: Keep your head up! Don't let yo' chin hit yo' chest! I send you much love, and my prayers are wit' you. Know that! Carnalita:

-Juicy

From The Beat: We can't even tell you how much we don't want to see you waste another year. Yet you're so hard-headed about making changes in your life. Our new year's wish, is that you start praying right, which means, for the strength to make changes in your life. And pray the same for your loved ones still lost in the game, inside and out (inside and out in the game, forms a single, unbreakable chain — 'till you're ready to change).

Wanted

the last time i felt wanted
was when i ran from camp
and the police kicked in my door
they said it was because of camp
it was trying to catch me
with something like drugs or a gun
or something similar to that

-Mike

From The Beat: Feeling wanted while you ran-a-way from a program (the camp)? Wanted, yes indeed, by the system and the police, but wouldn't it be nice if you could tell us of the time you felt really, really wanted by your little sister, your cousin, your girl, your parents and what that meant to you?

My Little Sister's Birthday

the last time i felt wanted
was on my little sister's birthday
she had her party and all her friends
wanted me to come out there
unfortunately i was in east oakland
gettin' it with my team on the grind
i wanted to go but i had money on my mind
and you know how that go — fast!

-Cold Man

From The Beat: Obsession and compulsion characterize an addiction. Obsession: can't get it off your mind. Compulsion: can't stop, even to go to your little sister's birthday party. No doubt you laugh at knocks and their disease. Now take a look in the mirror please. Thanks for your moving confession; just don't miss the lesson!

Santa Is My Mom

santa has got me through a lot
'cause i can wish for a lot of toys
when i was little i was so happy
but now i don't believe in him no more
santa is my mom and now i see that

-Brandon

From The Beat: Maybe it's time for you to play Santa to your mom and get your life together. What keeps getting you messed up?

Gonna Run

I been at Camp for hella long! This is Lil' Cartier, and I've been locked up for like ten months all together. But I go to court on Friday — and pray I get out! Also that's my birthday!

So they let me get out, and I'm gonna go stupid! And if the keep me I'm gonna run from Camp! To my boys, keep yo
Head up and stay wit' a strong mind.

-Cartier

From The Beat: We tell the story of how people do most of their time, and then when freedom approaches, they can't handle the stress and run — throwing away the whole effort! It sounds crazy to people when we tell them at the front end, but here you are talking crazy. If you keep a strong mind, you won't run, period. Plus, you throw up your gang call at the end of your piece (which we cut, of course), but your head is not in a good place — and it puts your future freedom at risk, just like running does. You are tripping, man. Slow your role.

Raw

they should call this murder
i'm killing the beat
my heart frozen
all you weak rappers
i ain't feeling ya heat
y'all softer than downy
laundry sheets
my taste buds is off
i don't know the taste of defeat
you so use' to losin'
i can beat you in a race
with no feet
plus y'all weak beefs
ain't beef at all
i can chew through that
wit' no teeth
you lookin' at the golden child
i shine hard like i
was raised by mister clean
for any writers bold enough
to swallow me
it'll take a thousand wishes
i'm the shark in the tank
with goldfishes
folks listen
i'm ahead of you son
too late to join the race
'cause this boy
already won
— that's raw

- F

From The Beat: We endorse battlin' in verse in the Beat and not guns in the street, we have to ask you to choose another one. We take off our hat to your lyrics and bow our heads, 'cause you kill your competition with words instead of hot lead, and welcome them to return from the dead if they're not too full of the dread of losing. It's an arena of competition where reputations are made without mother's dropping tears over children getting slain. Now if you could add teaching wisdom, like how a youngster can get out and stay out the system, and smash the competition as soundly as you do here — you'd be a Class A Beat sage with only a few peers spread out over The Beat's twelve years of existence. Raw truth is bullet-proof, as is resistance to oppression, if you can champion real education as well as you do your battling reputation. Peace in the Middle East and our own home streets!

Talk, Think, Work My Way Out

The way I deal with my problems, is talking to my mom. And sometimes she can help me. Or sometimes I go for a walk and just think. 'Cause my life has gotten so bad since I've been coming to the Hall.

I plan to get through high school with a four-point-oh GPA (grade point average). And that is how I will get out of the juvenile justice system, too.

-Brandon

From The Beat: Shooting for a 4.0 GPA is cool, but you don't need straight As to get or stay out of the system. What keeps bringing you back to lock up? Drugs? Crime? Fighting? Whatever it is, how have you gotten sucked back into it in the past? And what will you do differently in the future. Working hard is great, but what will you do at those times when you feel weak or worn out or tempted?

Outta the Hood

My way out? I would move outta my 'hood and get new friends, and also cut my hair off — but I don't think I want to do that quite yet.

-Z-rider

From The Beat: We see way too many who aren't ready to make changes till they hit max unit and are facing years. Start now before it gets worse than it is. You're on a down elevator, and you can choose to get off now or go lower.

Lil' Lady

it's been awhile since i've been here
sometimes it's hard to whisper in your ear
there was a time you claimed ya man
but i always said he didn't understand
that he had a lady that loves the bay
and she would go anywhere wit' dre
i'm gonna always be dre and you be you
just stay close and i'll stay true to you

-Andre

From The Beat: If you really care about this lil' lady, why would you want to see her in pink (i.e., county clothes!)? It doesn't sound like you're a good influence on her at all — and now you're both right here locked up in the Hall! When you write "loves the bay", you mean devoted to the gang life, which guarantees incarceration and perpetual strife. When you wish that for yourself, let alone for her — man, it's like a demon from hell uttering a curse! If you care for her, take back these words!

Stupid Stuff

you know what's cold
a fresh brick of 'tussin out the freeza
smokin' on dro'
wit' a what needs ya
want to please ya — me
and my lil' beegee
he already know
what i say go
that's my lil' baby gangsta
and he know i call the shots
i told him he gon' post for me on the block

-Torrin

From The Beat: We couldn't agree more that this is stupid stuff, and worse, since you're recruiting a youngster to inherit the curse of jails, hospitals and death — 'cause that's what sooner or later always comes next. This piece is beyond stupid, it's tragic. Wake up and face the fact that you're lost, before you and BG both have to pay the cost.

A Lot On My Mind

What up, Beat! It's your homeboy, Lil' Vee, comin' from Camp. I don't got nothing really to write about today 'cause I got a lot of stuff on my mind. Keep your head up; from,

-Lil' Vee

From The Beat: This is not such a bad place to think through some of that stuff on your mind. You'd be surprised how many people in here are stuck thinking similar things and might benefit from reading someone else trying to work it through — plus, you'd be surprised how much it could help you!

Camp

What's up, Beat! It's ya boy, Lil' Ant from Hayward. I wanted to say what's up.

I'm up here at Camp doin' this easy lil' program, just tryin' to get home on Christmas and New Year's. I came back and tested dirty for THC! they have some jankey tests up here! So if you're on your way up here — don't smoke! And if you drink, don't get caught. To all doin' time: Keep yo' heads up. And to tall fallen soldiers: RIP. This ya boy Lil' Ant, and I'm out till next time.

-Lil' Ant

From The Beat: Thanks for the good advice: Don't smoke marijuana, 'cause it stays in your blood stream for up to a month, stored in fat cells that slowly released back into your system — so you test dirty up to a month later! Well, that's only the institutional reason not to smoke. Take a look at your life and see that what you need to do to insure your future freedom would benefit from your taking a disciplined and focused approach to what you need to accomplish, for which smoking and drinking are no help at all, but potential pitfalls 'cause of what you might do or what's done by those you choose to be with (and you get caught up for it).

My Son Is My Way Out

my way out is my son
keeping my son on my mind
is always keeping my mind off of
the stress and pain of the life
i am going through
i think of my son on a daily basis
and remind myself no matter what
goes on in my life right now
i will always have someone
who will look up to me
the life i have lived is definitely not
a life i would want my son to live
that is the reason why i am going to be
a positive role model for my son
i love my son to the fullest
and anybody that wants to say different
can pick up their own guts when i am through
because homemade pistols have no barrel grooves
so that means no trace — ha ha ha

-My Mind

From The Beat: This was a beautiful poem till you got to those last few lines that are supposed to be funny. They indicate how toxic your mind still is, even though you love your son to the fullest. Even the way you phrase your love is the way a G celebrates his gangster mentality. We're not saying you don't love you son, because we know you do! But that love means you need to do a lot of work on you and the grooves your mind still runs through. It's the little things in life a youngster will feel and pick up on — so stay focused on that love and let it tenderize the role model you show your son. Much love.

At Camp

what it do beat
man i'm at camp writin'
feel me
only thang wrong wit' that
is i'm 'pose to be on the out
gettin' ready to celebrate
my "brah-brah close" friend's birthday
on the seventh of january
and my lil' female's birthday on the fifth too
happy new year

-Lil' Black

From The Beat: So this new year is guaranteed to have a tough start, when you miss the birthday parties of those you hold dear to your heart. Learn the lesson that you won't be locked up stressin' come next year if you change the decisions you make out there.

That Hangover

saturday night
steppin' out wi' the squad
going to the stro' so
i can have her give me money
by playin' with people's rods
i'm out there for a few hours
waiting on that dough
swing my right hand
walkin' with a limp like i smash' my toe
now i'm feeling myself like mac dre
without the 'fro

-Tams-mils-stretch

From The Beat: Do you know that your writing talent is superb? But your wasting your intelligence, not to mention your integrity, your freedom and your future on the pimping life. It will melt you faster than Iceberg Slim, have you living your life within a cage, if you're lucky with pencil and paper to fill a page with words. We don't know the magic spell to free you from this curse you spread through the streets of hell thinking you're doing well, feeling cool, as you victimize girl after girl playing each for a fool — putting her very life at risk so you can use her like a tool to make more money for you. "They can't even catch me with product," you might be saying. Quit! Before you're so toxic chasing cash your own soul is praying you crash and burn! Right now your intelligence subservient to vanity is just plain criminal insanity blocking your ability to learn — how to change before it's too late to turn. Mac Dre is dead, foo'! Just listen to you!

Tonight

nobody knows my struggle
they only see the trouble
not knowin'
it's hard to carry on
tryin' not to stumble
ashamed of my past
at night got me sleepin' last
never meant to do time
(my heart is in my rhyme)
i was death doin' dirt
now my soul is in hurt
late-night starin' at the ceiling
nobody feels my feelings
the days become dark
and your foes become shark
i'm seein' nothin' but hate
so many tears i have shed
i wanna die
but hopin' god that i could freely fly
prayin' to him to remember my face
and save me a place
so i can rest my case
i'm tired of this world
maybe one day you will feel what i'm feelin'
when your heart turns cold
and you feel hurt in your soul
my journey towards freedom
is taking' a new light
but these ninjas don't understand
if i died tonight

-Sohail

From The Beat: There are spiritual deaths, where one dies to the past, which is to say, the past self dies to liberate the reborn self hitherto hidden inside perhaps unseen, perhaps mute, perhaps appearing and speaking only in dreams, until now. Others need not understand when you are reborn as a new man, dedicated to undo your previous wrongs by remaining strong in your newborn commitment to do right regardless of the difficulty of your plight, or how difficult it is to pick yourself up after falling in a fight to change, failing in your purpose to forever quit the game and its pitiless code of self-serving hate that finally serves yourself up to the sharks of an unhappy fate. Well, all we're saying is, if you died tonight in a dream of freedom and light, awaken with a will to change your life and claim your place with forgiveness for all, including yourself, and renewed pride in what you are on track to become, not shame in the face of what you've done. It's time for the best in Sohail to resurrect!

It Made Me Happy

Christmas and New Year's was coo'. I spent time with my family and then with the wifey's fam'. I had a coo' time.

I got a few things. The best thing I got was my stereo system for my car! That made me happy. Well, that's it. I'm out.

-Lil' Soldier

From The Beat: We're glad to hear you had a coo' time and something good came your way. Still we feel this place is getting to you the longer you stay, 'cause you seem to have less and less to say. What are your plans for the future? We only ask 'cause we care and we're a little worried for you.

Baby It You

Baby I been wit' different kinds of girls
but none of them girls are like you.
Baby I done seen the best of the best
but ain't no girl like you
because everytime I think about you I'll smile,
your love is the best wit' that,
That's why I always like to be with you.
There isn't one day I can be without you,
because baby you're worth the trouble.
Love you baby.

-Javi

From The Beat: Such a Casanova—which "Baby" are you talking to? Or does this one go out to all of the ladies?

My Way Out

is
to find a legal
hustle
like opening a
business
or
door-to-door
salesman
plus i'll be
getting paid
over minimum
wage
then i'm gonna stop
hangin' out in the
streets
and i gotta
stop
smoking and drinking

-Unknown

From The Beat: Phew! Can you really do all that? We hope so. Start with a promise to yourself that you'll stop smoking and drinking, no matter what! You won't always feel terrific, but you'll learn how to handle both stress and your emotions without depending on a drug. Then with will-power and a clear mind, just keep suiting up and showing up for that job hunt — till you get what you want. Just don't quit on yourself on the road to legal wealth.

Hit By a Bullet

Being shot at ain't coo', especially when you get hit with a bullet. This is Grim from Hayward, and I have been shot at many times but only got hit once, at the right hip.

I was hella high on Friday, when some ninjas came out lookin' for a fight, and they found themselves gettin' beat up by me — so they decided to shoot me! But luckily I survived.

I'm at Camp Sweeney for a stolen car and DUI (driving under the influence). It's easy at Camp, but not for long, 'cause ninjas try to mess things up for you!

There's hella homies up here, too. Camp is better than Juvenile Hall, because you get more breaks and you can have some fun with your patnas.

If you do your program right, you can get out quicker and earlier than your sentence. For all, stay up and be safe out on the streets.

-Grim

From The Beat: We cut your final words: "so we can run the Bay"! Don't you see how that undermines everything else you wrote? With that as your goal, you will get shot at again. You will get hit by a bullet again. You may not be lucky enough to survive next time. What if the bullet hits your spine? And when you write stuff like that, you're encouraging others to risk their lives, well-being and freedom, too! Like you write at the beginning of your piece — it ain't coo'! So change what you choose to do. And if you can't change, please, don't try to take others with you or you'll prove that so-called friends can be your worst enemies, 'cause of the danger they lead you to!

How

i need money
i love money
i want money
i have money
i got money

-Cartier

From The Beat: You also got your freedom taken away. This sounds more like an addiction to fast money than a plan to ever be healthy, wealthy and wise. Addiction carries too high a price in the end, whether it's drugs or money, young friend.

Just Back From My Home Pass

What's good, Beat! This Savage from Berkeley, comin' at y'all one more time. Well, I'm doing good. I just came back from my home pass yesterday.

I got some female attention. Feel me? And I kicked it with some of the homies. I'm kind of happy 'cause they told me that my homeboy Smiley going to get out of Rita! And H-tip going to also get out. But I got three or four months to go here! But I'm also tripping 'cause it's 'bout to be a year since Rascal passed away. One love. For now, I'm gone, but I'm gonna hit y'all up later. Late.

-Savage

From The Beat: We left it this time, but don't just throw an RIP out there like that. Tell us about Rascal, who he was, how you knew him, why you miss him. And don't just do it 'cause we tell you it's a Beat rule, but do it to show love, honor and respect. Also you need to know that walking free isn't enough, 'cause if they don't change their ways, Smiley or Hollowtip (God forbid) might be next — or you. Something has got to change, 'cause the way it's going in the streets is just not coo'!

What is your way out?

I don't know my way out yet I'm still trying to find out.

It's hard though. I've been living the Latino gang life for seven straight years. What can I do? What should I do? It's confusing. I feel like hurting myself sometimes but...

-I want out

From The Beat: It breaks our hearts to read pieces like yours. We know what a good mind and soul you have inside of you, but you are also a product of your environment. By this we mean that before you were old enough to think for yourself, reflect, analyze, you were being pushed and taught to live your life a certain way. Now that you older and you are starting to see how destructive that way of life is, you're in so deep, it's hard to imagine getting out. But people do get out. What you have to ask yourself is how bad do you want that, deep down and what lengths are you willing to go to, to get out of a life of violence, substance abuse and prison?

Solid

Nobody like jail.
Jail is effed up and scandalous.
Some people like jail and that's them stupid mothas!
Some ninjas hate jail and when they be in there for too long
It mess wit' they mind.
Some ninjas start snitchin' and telling like a sissy.
I love them fools that put in work and when they go down they stay solid,
them some real ninjas!!!

-Lil' Dedo

From The Beat: The problem is you see things in black and white terms, but life is in many shades and colors. Sometimes it is messed up to snitch, and maybe other times it's not. There are no absolutes in life, period. When you begin to understand that, you will have begun to be an adult and a thinking person. We just hope that you haven't gotten yourself in too deep by the time that happens. Wake up!

Drunk

What's up Beat! This Tony from Fremont, still up here at Camp. I got my HV's (home visits) back. I had got restricted because I came back drunk.

So I went to the Hall for as few days, and now I can go back home again. I can't wait to go back on my block and drink some forty-ounce Old English 800! I'm out.

-Tony

From The Beat: No diss, but sometimes we can only hope that when a few weeks later you read words like these in our pages, you see how wrong-headed they are! You can't live without alcohol for a few months or what? Man, what's up with that? Don't blow this chance to make the changes in your life that can get you free of the system and keep you free from incarceration for the rest of your life. It's so disheartening to see the faces of those we like keep making the same mistakes over and over again until we hear they're in Rita waiting to go to the Pen'. Getting drunk is not a felony, but it's not a solution — or put it another way: So long as you confuse freedom with getting drunk, your chances of living responsibly are sunk.

Their Plan

it's their plan for us to fall down
and hit the dirt and never rise
to our full potential in life
see we are the future of tomorrow
when i say it's their plan
i don't mean the white man
it's not just him but other people too
more like the people who hate us
the people who hate to see people of color
succeed

-Fairlas

From The Beat: True that be, but it's also more than even just people — it's institutions, too. And we don't just mean the judicial system. In a way, a gang affiliation is an institution, too — and even if it's supposed to be about success, it's so-called code can make your life into a total mess. It's almost like the system and the street created each other, and to escape from one, you have to escape from both. And then there's all that prejudice against a young man of color with a criminal record! If you can turn it around and get your juvenile record sealed after you're eighteen — you are a big leg up on the whole otherwise discouraging scene. Slip back into a banging life, and you're giving ammunition to forces that act like your enemy!

My Mom Wanted

me to do good in school
but i let her down

-Brandon

From The Beat: It's not too late to make it right.

Dreamer, Parts One and Two

(Part One)
this dreamer
is he for her
or
is her mind in a blur
or
will his love be torture
or
will there be nothing to endure
we're not even a couple
so how can i be sure
he's not the guy who lives next door
more like a "gangster, a thug and some more"
though how can i be sure
she only met him once and nothing more

(Part Two)
Do you believe there can be
a future with you and me
Really dig deep down inside,
don't tell me a lie
if you must push your pride aside
Either you see me as a friend
or do you wanna pretend
we'll be together to the end
Are you sure you could be the one for me
My life hasn't always been so sweet
maybe you could add the sugar i need
Every time i think about you
i ask myself questions like
is this right
Regardless if it is or not
i'd still like you to be a friend in my life
and yes we'll greet the morning light
if not
no hard feelings or tears
will be left in my eyes
good night dream boy

-Jen

From The Beat: Dreams of love and romance can help distract you from the pain of living this incarcerated life behind a chain-link fence, but it doesn't help you in the least work your way through the pain of the past and figure out how to stay free. Part of what got you here is failing to see the bigger story — first do what you need to do to stay free, and then on the outs you will still see love's glory greet you one morning's dawning light. First things first, all right?

Wish I Was At Home

because i could do what i want
and smoke — i want a sip
of 'bo — i want to see
a girl i know

-Oba

From The Beat: Doing what you want when you want, is what got you here. Trying thinking about what you need to do to stay out of here!

Came Out Dirty!

Man, I'm mad as hell because yesterday I got a dirty pee test and I came out dirty! I don't know why! I didn't even smoke! They played me, because the testers be trippin' and it's nothing I could do about it.

They just don't believe you. They think you always lyin'! They don't never want to trust you. I told them the truth — that I was at my house all day! And dey said it's now way I could been at the house all day! They be talkin' about you like they knew what you was doing!

Now I gots to wait a whole month to get my HV's, and that's the only reason why I'm mad!

-Anonymous Camper

From The Beat: We had several pieces this week about dirty pee tests. Apparently it's a new test, and it's more sensitive than the old one. We can't say what percentage of error it might have. Still you will find unfair things happening both inside and outside the system often, and learning how to accept it without throwing you off your feet (acting out and getting write-up's, running, etc., in here; or riding, getting drunk/high or raging on the outs) is an important life skill.

Two More Months At Camp

What it do, Beat! This Lil' T at Camp. I been here since August, and I'm gettin' out in two more months. So I ain't really trippin' about it, but you do get tired of this place.

It's already '07! '06 went by quick. I think I'm gonna start making my own decisions for me to stop coming to jail, but to keep it solid. What I think about the county? I say, "Forget that shhh!" I ain't coming back!

-Lil' T

From The Beat: Keep it solid with yourself, 'cause your crew will have you doing things that risk your safety, health and freedom. We're not saying you have to be a mark or a snitch, but if you don't want to get locked up in this blitch — forget the county and forget the street. Get a j-o-b for your pay, and finish high school, Lil' T. Okay?

Become Somebody

my way out is going to school
and becoming somebody in this world
so you can have a safe environment to live in
and take care of your family by working
at a job that pays enough money that you can
afford a nice house to put yourself and your
family in

-Young F

From The Beat: Going slower gets you to your achievable goals better than the fast lane that will have you in and out of lock up or just in and living with that pain (if you don't die first in the game). While schooling leads to a job with decent pay, a safe environment that gets safer day by day, as your kids grow up safer, too, just watching what you do and trying to be like you!

I'm to the "Y" Soon

What's poppin', Beat? How's them workshops doing? Well, this is Baby Gesus comin' to ya from the max' unit. Yeah, I might be leaving to the Y in two weeks, and I can't wait to get up outta here! The way I look at it, the quicker I get to the Y, the quicker I'll be going home and being reunited with all my loved ones. You feel me?

But anyways, I would drop a couple of lines on this topic, but every time I express my opinion, The Beat ends up changing up what I write and making it sound hella soft! Not that I'm insecure about anything, but that just gets me hella mad. So instead, I'm just gonna keep on scribbling from off the top of my head until it's time to cut.

Oh yeah, before I forget, let me give a shout-out to stay up, and put all the stress to rest.

-Baby Gesus

From The Beat: You know we don't print shout-out's anymore in The Beat. Then we put a sliver of yours in, 'cause you're almost off to the Y, ya feel, and we end up having to cut half of the paragraph anyway! Why? Because you're still all about exactly the sort of thinking and behavior that got you here, but even more importantly from our POV, the choices that have both your homeboys and your rivals (along with anyone caught in the line of fire) buried six feet deep. Anything else you call "soft". Well, it takes a lot more courage to break out of that mentality than to stay in it, and the deeper you are into it, the more courage, strength of character and power of mind, it takes to break free from the lock-step propaganda that keeps you in line. We're not blaming you, but you never broke rank with a single thought, which no doubt you feel makes you a "good soldier", but we feel dooms you to a life of incarceration, if you don't get murdered first. We want you home with your family, but you need to do more than serve your time at the Y if you want to stay outside and free. We've got a soft spot for you, and that's why we seem like we're hard on you. You feel? We're not the system. We want to see "homeboys" stay free — to do that, you need to free your mind not just serve your time!

Dirty Test That's Not Really Dirty

This Camp stuff is crazy! You try to do good and do what you can, and it's always something that gets you down. And I mean you haven't didn't do nothing at all! You was with your family!

And I mean, you was really with your family and you know you was not dirty! And I don't know why people would get dirty anyway when you know you have to come back to go on another HV. But that's not fair when you know you're not dirty and still come back like that. That's not cool.

But anyway, that's not the way you should start your new year off! And I was not even doing anything, trying to do the right thing — and I still got my HV taken away from me. And I know I didn't do anything!

-Young Life

From The Beat: Unfair things will happen to you in here and on the outs, so use it as an opportunity to train yourself not to make things worse when bad things happen. Don't run, don't talk back to counselors — don't let your anger mess you up more. What's done is done, and your key to freedom is to keep doing right. Make it a habit, and in the end, you'll be more than all right — you'll never be locked up again for the rest of your life!

Feliz Año Nuevo

What it do, Beat! This the homie Dreamer from Hayward, comin' at you from Camp. Seven months behind these AlaCo walls. It's coo' 'cause I been doin' a coo' program and gettin' my HV's (home visits).

My bad to all who read my last Beat. The homie Chino never did get caught. I was kickin' it wit' him yesterday. Anyways, my holidays was coo', chillin' wit' the fam'bam. I got court in like five weeks on the sixth of February.

Oh yeah! Feliz año nuevo to all doing time. Ain't got no more time to write today, so to all— be safe.

-Dreamer

From The Beat: Let's hope Chino turns himself in before he catches another case, and even if he doesn't — when the judge becomes convinced he'll run from every placement, then he'll send him to CYA. It's not worth it. Talk to him, man! But look to your own plan, 'cause it doesn't end when you get released — you still have to make good decisions if you hope to stay free.

Man

i'm still here
but be out in a min'
and to my old unit
keep on doin' it
solid all right

-Lil' Tubs

From The Beat: Stay solid with your do-right goals, and when you get out, stay away from deeds that lead to locked doors.

These Streets Cold

what's cold is these streets
the way i live is cold
they say in these streets
"you gotta get it how you live"
so i guess that's what i call myself doin'
and yeah it ain't right
but you gotta do what you gotta do
to survive
whether that be robbin'
stealin' or lyin'
what's cold is how all these young cats
feel they gotta do stupid shhh
to get some respect

-Robert

From The Beat: When you wake up and see that "robbin', stealin' and lyin'" is not really helping you any longer with survivin' but instead is rushing you toward dying an early death — it's colder than cold, but you need to wake up and smell the coffee if you want to live to be old. Respect in the street is nothing but fear, and sooner or later, that so-called respect will land you in here or in jail or many long years in prison — and you'll be cursing some snitch or bad luck or some hasty decision. Life is a b— and then you die, unless you make up your mind to try to change your life and start doing right, 'cause by the time you hit max' you need to face the facts, no more jive; change is what you need to do now to survive.

Birthday, Christmas, New Year's Locked Up Is Cold

Being locked up for my birthday, Christmas and New Year's is cold, because I don't get to be with my parents and can't do what I wish to do, like throw a party or go to the club and get hella drunk and meet a girl I can hook up with....

-Casper the Ghost

From The Beat: Yeah, it is especially cold to be locked up when you could be out celebrating with family or a girl you like. So begin learning how to change your life, and by the time you're released, you'll know how do right and stay free. And if you don't get "hella drunk" you might even remember what a good time you had.

Keep My Game Tight

my way out is first gettin' out of the system
then it's stayin' out
i never ever want to see the insides of four walls again
then i want to get my mind on positive things
most of the ninjas around me have their mind on bling
bling
money signs in my eyes can you say ching chings
don't want anymore potnas 'cause their mouth go' sing
then there i am behind bars
wasn't i talkin' about my way out
but come to think about it there's no way out
have dreams that i'm home every night
every morning i wake up i'm ready to fight
what i really need to do is keep my game tight

-Lil' Dame

From The Beat: You've got to change your game, 'cause solo bolo will still end up the same. In the street, if it's not one trap it's another. The only way out is to change your game, young brother. Get a legal j-o-b if you want to stay free. Use this time inside to work on your mind, 'cause you're guaranteed to slip if you return to the grind.

My Confessions

all i know is
the sky is clear
and the coupes stay
clean and bright
when ya money right
'cause the coke is white
i remember when
i couldn't afford no clothes
i know being broke
is bad for my health
nightquil green twenty-six inch
these are my confessions
i'm a sucka for clothes
my paper stacks up if i let it
but i keep messin' up
i got a shoe fetish
bad habits
i'm at the mall every week
fifty pairs of new nike airs ain't cheap
and you know i got to get a fit to match
when i'm done throw the bags in the trunk
telling my girls what's up
every dude in the projects
want to do me
'cause i got money
even in the drought
i don't play
'cause only time will tell
i'm addicted to that smell
i need to be cool
before they give me indictment papers
next these young ninjas go' be
dressing like me
back in ninety-three
they wasn't stressin' like me
you need to save
yo' money up
and find out who got
them for ten a key
[to be continued]

-Aleisha

From The Beat: You've been here for nine months now, and you're still dreaming the life that brought you here is your cash cow. You know we respect your writing skills, and we respect the effort you've made to change. What we don't understand is when you throw out your new plan as if all this never happened, as if the person you were before you came here is still out there slappin' beats in a Coupe de Ville, as if people out there aren't getting themselves killed selling dope and caught up for some related crime they did or didn't do that has them locked up so long that hope doesn't even feel cool. So slow your role. Yeah, you were boss, and you used to floss, but return to that life and it will be your loss. Put your mind to better use and when the street calls to you — refuse! You don't need more of the system's abuse! Every Friday the eagle flies when you get yourself legal-wise. You feel? We're just saying to stay free, you need to make your pay legally.

Lil' Gumby Flowin'

i'm not playin' no games, you might see me tomorrow
but today i'm locked up 'cause the system labels me malo
but i'm just trying to eat, i'm in love with money
married to the game, i say no jokes, it ain't even funny
just 'cause i post on the block and go eighteen dummy
i ain't slippin' although i plays with fire
false i-d to police, so they call me a liar
a young boss that folks love to admire
i got money on my mind, big stacks i desire
got to gets my scrilla, i'm the king of the hilla
i pops pilla, ya feela, the feeling is reala
yung lil' gumby, my next move is manilla

-Lil' Gumby

From The Beat: We had to dam your flow here and there, 'cause flossin' murderous talk may be okay on the air waves, but The Beat is all about learnin' to care about yourself and everyone else more than sick dreams of gangster schemes that sound more like drugged delirium the clearer and more often we hear 'em. So hats off to your sound, 'cause you spit rhymes hotter than a volcano primed to pop its top with molten stone fallin' out of the sky — but we strongly recommend you change your mind so you can live your life free rather than die young in the street or with shackles on your feet in the SHU (security housing unit) of some penitentiary. Wake up Gumby before it's too late. Okay?

Wanted On the Block

last time i felt wanted
was when i was on the block
and i was gettin' money
and five-oh came
me, my bra twan, his sis
and the rest of the block
that get money wit' us
five-oh hit the block
and was lookin' for us
but at first we didn't see
them comin' 'cause
we had a dice game
i had a three hundred dollar bet
so that how it do on my block

-Lil' Pug

From The Beat: All that excitement of handling "big" money when you're still a youngster, is just a set-up for a life of coming in and out of incarceration — and the longer you continue to do it now, the less it will be worth the price you're paying. It seems like the block is rolling hard, but really it's your death bell tolling far and loud. Break away from the crowd and save your life. Finish school, get a legal job and live right. In a penitentiary calling your gang your family, or living outside with a real family with kids, telling them you'd be dead or in jail if you hadn't quit what you use to do.

On the Run

the last time i felt wanted
was when i was on the run
and this ninja tried to kill me
because of something my brother did
i'm glad i'm here because i know
dude out there want my head
but it's good though

-Lil' Darnell

From The Beat: If someone out there wants you dead, is there some place you can go after Camp instead of going right back to that useless funk? Relatives you can stay with while you finish high school? Maybe God put you in here for a reason. So use your reason to stay away from danger waiting out there for you.

Cold People

what's cold is life
cold people always want to laugh
in your face and talk about you
behind your back but they
call their selves friends
well i ain't got friends
i ain't got nothin' but me

-Lil' Darnell

From The Beat: We cut your threat at the end, 'cause it feeds right into that prophecy of your own death you make in another piece in this week's Beat. Start by getting killing out of your mouth. Begin to create some mental space to envision a long life.

What's Done Is Done

this game it tough, my life is too
but what the freak else can i do
they say i can do this or i can do that
but i always end up wit' the gat
when i get out, i'll change it all
and go somewhere and play some ball
or work at the beat and see what that like
you never know it might be all right
but i'll think of something, i know i can
'cause as of may, i am a man
the reason i say that, i got a son
i did what i did and what's done is done

-Lil' Tb

From The Beat: You don't have to stay with The Beat, but it's easier to find a job when you have a job — it looks better on the application 'cause they know you're not just fakin'. And they can call The Beat to ask if you're a good worker that knows how to show up and follow through on a task.

What's Cold Is ...

when your pee-oh
put you in the hall
for getting suspended
from school

-Brandon

From The Beat: So tell us the whole story. What happened? How'd you get suspended? What would you do the same and what would you do differently, if you had it to do over again?

When I Look In the Mirror I See

she is ugly because i don't like her
she makes me very mad
she turned herself in and went to jail
and i don't appreciate it at all

-Sparkles

From The Beat: But when she's released with no warrant chasing her into trouble, maybe she'll look in the mirror and feel proud and grateful to herself for having had the courage and maturity to do the right thing — and she'll look as beautiful to herself as she does to us! Much love and respect.

Cold Rules Here

what's cold — staff
is what's cold
they don't even let you talk
when you irritated 'cause
someone is making you mad
and instead of sending
that someone to her room
they send you to your room
and then you end up
getting even angrier at
that someone who made you mad
'cause staff sent you to your room
and didn't send her to her room
but i have to admit that it
made the situation better than it was

-Lil' Snow Rabbit Meli

From The Beat: The only way out of the box you describe, is to learn to control your temper when it first arrives. Learn to erase the irritant from your mind, as if you'd suddenly gone deaf, mute and blind. Also just as you do here, writing can help you get clear of the rage, help you turn the page. 'Cause those last lines your dropped showed wisdom beyond your age.

Death

the only way that i see
myself getting out
is by death
either by the police killing me
or getting killed by the streets

-Lil' Darnell

From The Beat: Darnell, man, open your eyes wider, broaden your vision — find another way out! Try another life style! What do you have to lose since this life style means death!

Family

when i look back
at my childhood
i was getting good
clothes and nice shoes
but what santa played
in own family

-Anonymous

From The Beat: When you finally realize your family is Santa, you learn that the giver of gifts is really the best gift of all — family, is what that greatest gift is called.

New Year's Resolution

My New Year's Resolution is to get off probation after I finish the Ranch program. Yeah, I'ma be writing from LCRS, but I ain't trippin', dough. But, yeah, I'm gonna get a job and stop smokin' weed. Yeah, I'm 'bout to make it big, legally, but, yeah, that's my resolution.

-Young Ant U3

From The Beat: Sounds like a plan—to get yourself off probation, Young Ant. Our only concern is whether you have made similar promises to yourself in the past. If so, what will be different about this time? Have you thought how you want to make it legally? Finishing school is a good place to start...

The Halls....

The halls helped me in a way, 'cause I know that if I change the bad things I'm doing. And most people don't like it here, so you know what you gotta do to stay out of here. I come in here and think about the thing I did. When I can just think about what I'm doing before I do it anyway.

-Dodd U3

From The Beat: So, if you "know what you gotta do to stay out of here," the only question is: are you going to do it? The answer to that question is not in the words you write, but in the deeds you do.

I Thought...

I thought I had a family that cared, but it turned out to be the other way. My uncle's best friend that I knew worked in the halls in the same unit as me, but he turned out to be a little bullshhher, but I don't care, 'cause I like being on my own, anyway

-Lil' Crazy U3

From The Beat: What does it mean to you to be on your own? Just because this family friend turned out to be a disappointment, that doesn't mean everyone will disappoint you. There really is no way in this world to be totally on our own. We have to depend on others. Who can you depend on? We had to cut the end of your piece because it is not appropriate for The Beat — and makes us think that you have not yet matured into the responsible young man you could be. We're hoping that maturity comes to you before it's too late.

Juvy Got Me Smarter

The halls helped me because I am not on the streets doin' other things like fights and other thangs. I don't like being here, but it got me smarter.

-Jiggz U3

From The Beat: How has being here made you smarter? How do you plan to use your new knowledge to keep yourself free? If you can't stay free, then what more do you need to learn?

The Hall Has Helped

Yes, the hall has helped me in a way I couldn't have imagined. It showed me how to stop taking life for granted and many other things. I just want to be home with my baby. I learned my lesson from being in here. You can't go to the restroom when you want and I don't like that at all I just want to go home man.

-Destiny U5

From The Beat: Do you mean that just being here has taught you that it's not the place to be? Didn't you know that before you came? Well, if you've really learned this lesson, then this is your last time here. You need to be a mother, and a mother does not do things that allows others (the system) to take her away from her kids. Word to the wise.

The Hall Has Not Helped Me

No, it do not help me, because when I come in here, I always get time and I need to be on the out with my family on the out, and I need to see my female.

-D U3

From The Beat: If you keep coming back here, it's hard for us to believe that you "need to be out" with your family. If you needed it, you'd find a way to get it. Instead, you keep finding ways to give the system power to take you from them. Do you have some power and responsibility to change this? If this isn't helping you stay free, what would help you to do that? (In future, please put your name more clearly; we could not read it!)

The Hall Helps And Hurts

To me, Juvenile can be helpful, but then it can't. It can be a wake up for some to get they life straight, or you don't care. It can be difficult if you make it.

Me, every time I come here, I just try and make the best of it. I know this ain't the place to laugh, but sometimes shhh be funny. I mean, when I come, I do my time, have a couple of laughs, and get on. A lot of people come here—fight, yell, kick doors, cuss out staff, and they wonder why they don't go home. I can say that the hall did help me, but then it doesn't.

-DR U3

From The Beat: If you can control yourself in here (while the less mature cannot), then what keeps you from controlling yourself out there? If your actions help to get you out of here quicker, can you find a way to keep yourself out longer — or forever? What do you need to do to get your life straight? When you write "every time I come here," you're telling us that you haven't yet learned what you need to stay out. Will this time be different?

New Year's Resolution

What's good, Beat? This that young ninja, Da Carter, ya heard? But, uh, yeah, man. My New Year Resolution is to get off probation. Don't come back to this weak-ass shhh, especially now that the new halls is opening in a hot minute for us. I been in here for about a month, and I got court December 21st. Man, I hope I get out because my New Year Resolution will happen, so 'til then, I'm a keep my head up and stay up. Write you in a minute, Beat.

-Da Carter U3

From The Beat: Getting off probation is a given — if you stop doing whatever has brought you here. We hope you get out and prove to yourself that you are up to the difficult task of staying free.

New Year

Man... New year is coming so soon... I really hope I will get out before New Year, but then I don't know about it. I'm having court again on the 19th. I really hope I will be out before New Year because I'm for sure I will be up in here for Christmas. I just can't believe I got into this kinda bs...

I've spent Thanksgiving here already. I really don't wanna spend Christmas here, but I really don't know. I'm just too stressed to even know what I'm talking about and thinking. Just wanted to write a little bit to the beat.

-Soda U7

From The Beat: Of course you're stressed, Soda. Who wouldn't be in this place? But we wish you would focus on the Christmas (Thanksgiving, etc.) coming up. You can't do anything about the past, but you can let the past guide you into a different future — one that lets you spend holidays with those you love.

My Dream

Yeah, I had dreams that seemed like it was trying to tell me something, and, yeah, I do remember it.

-P Rush U3

From The Beat: Why not share your dream with The Beat — and tell us what it was trying to tell you.

What Has The Halls Done For Me?

The halls taught me not to act up. I'm in for nothing now. But I still hit licks, but this is the first time I been here for nothing. But I'm gonna change, man, when I gonna get out and get a job. When I get out I gonna chill wit' my girl.

-Yung Money U3

From The Beat: Those "licks" you've been hitting is a way of living off someone else's hard work, a selfish and lazy way to earn your living. Time to grow out of that childish approach to earning your way in life, and doing it right. What will you do when you get out of here to change those childish ways, and live responsibly?

What I Miss Most....

I miss being on my block. I miss riding with my homies. I miss life on the streets, going to school, being with my lady. I miss going out, chilling with my lil' brah. I miss my fam and my homies, who kept in touch wit' me while I'm locked up. I should've listened to my loved ones telling me to quit being a hot boy, but what can I say? Stuff happens.

-Little Rascal U3

From The Beat: Do you miss all these people enough to keep yourself out, Little Rascal? As long as you miss "smashing" on anyone (we deleted this line), then we don't think you really miss your freedom s much as you claim to, because "smashing" on people is a certain prescription for returning to this place. That leads us to believe you like it here more than you're willing to admit. If you find a way to stay out, then you will prove us wrong. We hope you do.

New Year's Day

What's good with The Beat? This ya boy, Twon, from that good B1 status (now U3). What the young thug gone do on New Year's day is find a party in the town and go there wit' the goons, get some beezies, then go to the spot, chill for a good minute, then chill with my big bra and sister and keep it lit from there.

-Twon U3

From The Beat: Your focus — parties, hanging with your boys on the block — is like a money-back guarantee that you'll be seeing a lot more of the insides of this place. At some point as you mature, we hope you now only see how much you are giving up by coming in here, but what you have to do — and not do — to keep yourself free.

What The Counselors Taught Me

It kinda helped me a little bit, because the counselors taught me to respect people. They taught me to not use bad words. They taught me not to trust people in the halls, and not to be cool with everyone.

-Joseph U3

From The Beat: What do you mean they taught you "not to be cool with everyone?" How do you know who to be cool with and who not to be cool with? How have you learned to be more respectful? How will the lessons you've learned here help you stay out of here?

Helped Or Not Helped?

Well, every time I come here, I think about stuff, and I don't think about all the good things I have until I don't have them any more. The halls help me think about all the things I've done. Well, that's all I could think of, because the hall don't really help me in a positive way. I just want to get up out of here, so I could do my year and get out free again.

-Smiley U3

From The Beat: You will get free again, Smiley, but have you learned enough to keep yourself free? If you've learned that nothing's worth being locked up, then what is your plan of action to put your knowledge to use?

I Was Always So Angry

Yes, the halls helped me, 'cause when I was out, I was always so angry and going off on my family all the time, when they're the only ones who give a damn about me.

I have to go to a group home for three months and when I get out, I'ma be so much better — no weed smoking for me, just family. No more anger problems. I truly miss them and I'm sort of glad they locked me up, 'cause if something happened to them, I would go crazy.

So thank you, Barbara G, Steve Z and Kim C, and most of all, thank my loving grandparents, Wilma and Jessie Pratt.

-Phat Boi U3

From The Beat: Anger comes from a lot of places, but mostly from pain. How will you channel that anger when you're on the outs so it doesn't hurt the people you love, which in turn only hurts you? We truly admire your determination to make these important changes in your life, and we hope you stick to them. We also hope you show this piece to your family, and especially to your grandparents who will feel really good to read what you've written.

The Hall Helped Me A Lot

Juvenile helped a ninja out a lot because you get to think a lot. While you in ya room chillin', you would be like, "Damn, I should've did that and that."

But that shhh don't matter no more 'cause you in here. But now it's a good time to think about life 'cause I know some people be like, "Damn, I could have been dead right now if I was on the outs." But shhh, I'm tryna change on mamas cause ninjas getting' older, not younger. So you betta do wat cha do.

-Al-Bundy U7

From The Beat: We hope you do the kind of thinking you describe here, Al, because it's time for you to make those changes you've been promising yourself to make for a long time. By now, you have all the experience you need to see where the journey you've been on leads. Why not try a new path with a better destination?

Thinkin' Of You

Late at night when the world is sleepin', I stay up and think of you, and I wish on a star that somewhere you are thinking of me too! My dreams seem so real, but when I wake up I feel relieved 'cause I snapped back to reality.

My dreams keep telling me we weren't meant to be, but I miss you. I love you, but after what I been told, I should say forget you. But I'm not gone trip. It's all right. I'm just gone go to sleep, so good night!

-Paradise U5

From The Beat: It's hard being away from someone special and having no control over your relationship. If this person is seeing someone else on the outs, then maybe you have to look at your own actions that gave power to the system to take you away. One of the biggest heartaches about being locked up is that life on the outside just keeps going on... without you.

The Halls Haven't Helped Me

It don't help me at all because you in yo' room. Ain't doing nothing but think all day about getting out and tryin' to do good, but really not tryin' to do but stay on the block and get caught up again.

But as fo' me, I might get out or go to the Ranch, but I hope I go home. I been here 85days.

On some for real shhh, I'm gonna really try to do good and keep prayin' ta God. Even if I don't get out, I'ma keep prayin' until I get out, and that day will come soon, very soon.

-Jeremiah U7

From The Beat: Yes, you will get out, Jeremiah, but that's the easy part. Have you learned how to stay out? If you know what put you here, then you also know what will keep you out of here. Of course, knowledge is not enough. You also have to be committed to changing the road you've been walking. Are you up to it?

Moving On

I don't think this spot did shhh. Maybe if they would've let me out, I would've probably changed my life. But now this shhh just make me more mad, so I hope they just get the hell out my life and let me do what I do. Maybe I can just stay out of trouble. I don't know whether or not I want to go to another group home, because that boring.

-Young Drew U3

From The Beat: It sounds like you're thinking that you're going to get even with "them" by putting yourself deeper into the hole you're already in. How does this make sense to you? If "this shhh makes you mad," then you must be truly mad at yourself, because it's you who gave the system power over your life. And it's you who is declaring in this piece that you plan to give up your freedom again. To us, that just isn't worth it. We wonder why it's worth it to you....

Comin' To The Halls

I think that comin' to da halls is a mix of good and bad. It could be good because you have time to think 'bout your actions, and what you do. It has you missin' stuff that you had before, and don't have now. And people miss you. It just gives you time to get yo' shhh straight and ready for the stuff we got to live wit'.

I think the bad come in that it ain't no girls in here, none of the good stuff that I always get from them just for being me. And just being me needs what they be given...

But being in here takes away everything that I was working on, and I was workin' on a lot — my family, money, and my girl, and the block is all gone. But just for a minute, so I guess that the bad in coming in here falls back to the good.

-F. Good U7

From The Beat: If you mean that being in here will keep you from coming back, then we agree it's for the good. But if all this time gives you is a chance to think about going back too the block and making your money, then this is nothing but a stop along a road that leads to places we are 100% sure you don't want to be. If you love what the girls give more than you hate being locked up with a bunch of boys, you'll find a way to stay out. If you don't, it will appear that you don't mind it here after all.

New Year

All I gotta say is Bundy 'bout to have mo' females, mo' money, mo' cars, and mo' fame ninja, on ma mama.

-Al-Bundy U7

From The Beat: We hope you get all of that without also pickin' up "mo' time."

How Juvie Helps

The Juvenile hall helps, but in a different way. The room just make you think a lot about what you gonna do when you get out... do good or bad, one of dose. When you leave Juvenile Hall you got to worry about the beef and the drama and all the stuff your parents going to say, and it gets me mad. Then I end up back in YGC thinking and stuff. It helps, but in different way, like I said.

-Young Kut U4

From The Beat: If you already know that you will be going out there to the same old beef, why are setting yourself up for failure by going back to the same trap. If you change the way you've been doing things when you go home, then you won't have to worry about the beef, the drama and all the stuff your parents are going to say...

I'm More Responsible

The halls helped me in some ways, such as doing stuff that can get me in trouble and send me right back to Juvenile. I don't like being in here. Being here got me more responsible and more wiser.

-Young Torrell U3

From The Beat: How will you use your new wisdom keep you free when you're on the outs? How will you be different this time?

If The World Was A Stage

If the world was a stage, I would want to be a police officer. Just because if I was a cop, police can't go to jail if they on they shhh.

-Young Meel U7

From The Beat: You're wrong about that. There are police in jail (probably not as many as break the law), and they have to do their time in PC. You can imagine why!

Still Gonna Do What I Do

No, not really, 'cause I'm still going to do what I do. Yeah, it made me a lot stronger in the mind by me being smarter about what I'm going to do. But, yeah, this ain't nothin' up here but mind games.

-P Rush U3

From The Beat: If you are "still go9ing to do w'at you do," then you really haven 't learned much of anything. Only a fool or a child thinks they can keep doing what they've been doing without facing the same consequences they've been facing. So, which are you, a fool or a child?

New Year

I'm tryin' to get it poppin' on NewYears. I plan on chillin' wit' my chick, feel me? Watch the fireworks wit' her, go out to dinner, slide to the hotel have a lil' celebration, ya know? Bottle of that Bacardi grand melon wit some hyphy juice, ya dig? For swisher's filled wit' my best friend Barney. Fire up an start floatin'. Got me feelin' like my lil' cousin Casper. We might watch a lil' movie too...

I'm not out I'm up.

-Up Top U7

From The Beat: It's interesting to us that you only mention your girl, but you do a lot more than mention your drink and your smoke. Seems to us you're fiending for your drugs more than you're fiending for your girl, and that tells us things we wish you would examine. Unless you do, you won't be spending all that much time with her before you're back here kickin' it with nothing but boys!

More Involved In My Religion

The only way the hall has helped me is to be more involved in my religion. Now that I don't really got anything to do, I can go to church. They come over here, so it's easier for me.

-Lil' J U3

From The Beat: Will your involvement with your religion carry over when you get out of here, or will you forget the lessons your religion teaches when you are able to exercise choice again? What are the lessons of your religion? What have you learned?

Appreciating Mom And Home

The halls has helped me know that my mom loves me and I have a good home. Also don't do anything that might get me back in here. And that I am a good person.

-Roderick U3

From The Beat: These are profound lessons, Roderick. How will learning that you are a good person change how you act when you leave here?

My Life's Messed Up

New Years is coming up. Also Christmas and I'll be inside here during both of them. Last time I was inside here, I got out Christmas Eve, and right after Christmas my mom got murdered. I wish she was still here, so I could see her when she comes to visit me. It was so hard to see her in that casket lying there soulless.

My uncle died right after her and I just wish they was here to share Christmas and New Years with my family. I wish I was never caught up in this, so I could be out there having fun in da streets. Even though my life feels so messed up I gotta keep my head up and become something to prove everybody else wrong.

-G-Boa U4

From The Beat: You have written about this terrible double tragedy before, and we are so sorry you had to experience it. But when you're in here thinking about going out "having fun in da streets," we're not sure you're using your time well. There is so much more than having fun, like school, preparing for your future, work, etc. If all you think about is having fun, we're afraid you'll be right back here again, having no fun at all. As you have learned, some treasured things, once lost, are lost forever. Don't let your freedom be one of those things.

The Halls Has Helped

The halls has helped me in school because I had credits to make up, and when I had came to the halls they told me that I could get more credits than at a high school on the outs. Now I have more credits than I need, and that's one that I thank the halls for.

-Young Money U4

From The Beat: Have you learned the things those credits stand for? If so, then the hall really has helped you. We hope you're truly getting the education you need, because if you're getting credits for things you haven't learned, once again you're being set up to fail. What are your plans once you leave this place?

New Year

Man, what's up with da Beat. Man, for the new year I'ma just try to get off probation. But for right now I'ma try to go to Glen Mills and do good for right now.

-D U4

From The Beat: Getting off of probation is a worthy goal. Meanwhile, put your all into making sure that you succeed at Glenn Mill (or wherever you go) so that you can move on with your life in freedom.

Locked Up

I don't think being in jail helps me because all they do is lock you in your room for most of the day. You have to ask to use the bathroom and stuff, and they feed you some nasty-ass food bank food.

I can't smoke weed I can't smoke a cigarette. I can't hug my nephew, my mom or none of my family. I think juvenile can't make everybody change. I think some people can be in juvenile for a long time and get out and do the same thing. They stick wit' it because when I get out I know I'm gon still smoke cigarettes and I might get hella drunk. Then I'ma go to school and be a good girl.

-Nannah U5

From The Beat: It doesn't really work like you think it should, Nannah, and if you follow your "plan," we're afraid we'll see you again behind these walls. If what you're thinking about doing is smoking weed and getting "hella drunk," you won't then go to school and be a good girl. You'll be a drunk girl, meaning one who can't think, can't reason, can't keep a clear head — and can't keep the promise she's made! We know you don't want to hear this, but like we read so often, we gotta keep it real!

Many Ways The Hall Has Helped

Yes, it helped me in a lot of ways. It helped me trip off how I have changed my life and how much I need to change, and to be prepared for when I get out.

It showed me how to have patience because I never had the time of day to listen to nobody. I was on the run and thought I was just gonna be all right but, when I got here that all changed and made me think about how I can change. When I go home I will.

-Lil' Foot U5

From The Beat: Does this mean that this is your first time here? If so, then we hope it's been enough of a shock to change your ways, as you promise you plan to do. What, specifically, will you do (or not do) that's different from the past? What are you doing to prepare yourself for when you go home?

The Halls Don't Do Nothing For You

I've been to the hall plenty of times, in and out. This is my 8th time in this hole, and to tell you the truth, this is all a set up. Basically, it's a hustle for the system for them to get paid. They put you in programs that they know you are not going to do, and then you get a warrant. Eventually you get caught up again, and next thing they talk about sending you to a group home or a ranch. This place don't do shhh for you. The only way it help is unless you help yourself.

-Slim-Loon U4

From The Beat: Well, exactly, SL. You must want to help yourself — and you must define "help" as finding a way to stay free. There's a lot to say about the piece you wrote, but let's make it all simple. If you eliminate all the things you do that lead you to the hall, then you will be helping yourself!

I Need You

Living in pain ain't no game
Thinking 'bout you puts my life to shame
It's something about you dat got me going insane
All I want from you is the time of day
Ta show you that I care and dat I really want to be there
I just want you to be in my arms
And whisper in ya ear
An' tell you things dat will keep you safe an' warm
I'm just bein' fa real about the way I feel
I want you and I need you

-Lil' Soulja U5

From The Beat: We believe your words, but your actions tell us something different. You allowed yourself to be taken from this warm and safe embrace by doing whatever it is that got you here. At that moment, it was more important to you than she was. That's what you have to work on. If you don't, you'll find yourself alone and lonely, writing sad love poems about what might have been...

Untitled

We make mistake's to be forgiven. We are too young too stress and suffer. We're in here because we gave our mind away! As soon as we made that decision, we put our freedom into "they" hands, and all they wanna do is make money, not help you.

You dwell on the fact you up in here. You learn yo' lesson and they don't believe you. You lose your mind without even knowing it. The tears you cry are never of joy, but always of pain, sorrow, loneliness, and longing for someone's love.

They never say, "I forgive," but they do say, "You a screw up!" We need to hear that you forgive us, and don't say it if you don't mean it.

-Moni U5

From The Beat: You know, Moni, we read a lot of complaints about how the system only wants to make money and not help you. But it seems to us that you are also describing yourself, wanting to make money but not help yourself (in a real, long term way). Can you imagine how many young men and women have insisted they've learned their lessons, only to go back to doing what brought them here in the first place? Why should "they" believe words, when it's action that proves the words? Your description of what it's like to be locked up is right on the money, but don't expect the system to forgive you. That's not what they're in business to do (and we do mean business). You must forgive yourself — and that only comes by acknowledging your mistakes and sincerely committing yourself not to make them again. "They" won't change. That's up to you...

Tryin' To Get Out

Man, I'm tryin' to get out right now because I been in here too long. I been in here for three months now, and this shhh is takin' mine 'cause these staff in here be doin' too much. It's bad enough I'm in here, but they still tryin' to lock us up givin' us time. Tryin' to get out.

-D U4

From The Beat: Where's your sense of responsibility for the circumstances you're facing? Didn't you do something that gave these staff power to control. In other words, aren't you complaining about how you're being treated in a place where your own actions put you? Seems to us that if you want to avoid this consequence in the future, you'd better avoid what leads to these consequences.

The Gangbanging Life Is Fun For Many People

Many people say that they want to get away from the gangbanging life, but many people don't want to get away from that life, because it's fun to them. That's the life they've been living for a long time. That's the thing that they only have and it's not like you're gonna want to change the life you like.

-Lil' J U3

From The Beat: The problem with that "life you like" and don't want to change is that others, with real power, can force you to change by doing what they've done to you at this moment: lock you up. That's not something that anyone likes, including you, so unless you factor in those consequences (and some much, much worse than this), you're not being honest about "the gangbanging life." For those who thought like you and have paid the price with their lives, there is no more fun at all. Ever. Is it worth it?

Thinking Better

The Halls helped me think better and learn things, like never come back and clean up my act. When I get out, there will be no more gangbangin' and stuff like that. I will think that it's not good to be in here. I have friends in here but they're not going through the things I'm going through. I can't wait till I get out and to see my friends from my block again.

-Lil' D U4

From The Beat: Are you sure that you're really done with gang banging and the other activities that lead to jail? This is a question that you need to answer honestly. You're promise to stop doing these things is not to convincing when all you can think about is getting back to the block to see your friends. How soon do you think that arrangement will lead to a return trip here?

They Make You Think

I think the halls is helping me by the way they lock you up and make you think a min. about what you did. Also the counselors helped us a lot by giving us lectures. Most of the kids don't listen, but it really made me think. So I owe my thanks to all the counselors.

-Notorious Mk U4

From The Beat: It's good that you are open to hearing the counselors. Like others who are older than you, they may have knowledge and experience that can help you to get your life back on track, and to stay out of places like this.

The Halls Helps...

Juvenile helps in some ways, like sometimes its good because you have plenty of fun. But then it's the rooms. The rooms would make you just think such as think about what you did. Also like what you gone do when you got out and is this the last time you going to be in here.

-Nino U4

From The Beat: So, when you think about what you're going to do (and not do) when you get out, what is it that you see?

Last Time I Felt Wanted

The last time I felt wanted was when my dad told me that he wanted me home, not in jail. Another time is when I last saw my girlfriend, when I walked her home and she told me that she loved me.

-Jacky U3

From The Beat: Now you have to show them how much you want them, by not doing the things that allows the system to take you from them.

Everybody's Getting Locked Up

What's up, Beat? Yeah, man, this Drew. What it do? I'm trying to get up out of here. Man, everybody getting locked up nowadays. My big homie going back to the pen. Me, my brother and my cousin are all here in different units. I'm just trying to get up out this week. If I don't, that means that y'all gonna get another Beat from me. All I got to say

is forget YGC and all these probation officers and the police. All right, then.

-Drew U3

From The Beat: No, not everybody is getting locked up, Drew. It's only those who think they can be slick without facing consequences... It really doesn't matter if you say "Forget YGC and these probation officers" or not. The system will always respond in the same way, whether you curse it or not. The only way to really "Forget YGC" is not to do the things that bring you (and your brother and cousin) here to begin with. You have to make a choice: Do you want to spend much more time cursing the system, while under its control, or do you want to get out from under its control and start living your life?

No Santa Ever In My Life

Santa has played no role in my thirteen years of life. I never thought of Santa ever in my life, because then in my life I have never celebrated Christmas.

-Jacky U3

From The Beat: Is this a cultural difference, Jacky? Did your family celebrate other holidays that you looked forward to as a child? For example, what do you do at Chinese New Years? (The Beat would like to take only one topic, not four topics! When you write on so many topics, the most we can get is two or three sentences on each. When you choose just one topic, you can concentrate all your thinking on it, and that gives us a much better picture into who you are — and who you want to become. Next time...)

The Halls Is Weak

The halls is weak as hell. No one likes to be here. This is hella bad. I think I can have dreams, but that's it. You can play in a lil' small place. It ain't fun at all.

People come in here thinkin' they hard, and you get a lil' time out in yo' room. But a ninja like me is strong. It ain't nothin' at all.

-Cornelious U4

From The Beat: As long as you think handing over your freedom to a bunch of strangers is "nothin' at all," then you're no stronger than the halls themselves! Freedom is your birth right. Handing it away is always something! You say you're strong, but this piece doesn't show us that at all. Where will your "strength" take you?

If The World Was A Stage

If the world was a stage, I'll be the director.

-Notorious Mk U4

From The Beat: We've got news for you: the word IS a stage, and you ARE the director. Now it's time to change your direction...

One Dream That I Had...

One dream I had it was about me and my girlfriend. The dream was about me and my girlfriend just at my house watching a little love movie. But like when I wake up I got mad because I want it to be real one day. It affected me because I learned my lesson and I'm going to change.

-Nino U4

From The Beat: The question is, what are you going to change when you get out of here so that when the opportunity to touch this dream comes your way, will be ready to reach out to grab this dream? (The Beat wants you to choose only one topic and write a lot more about it. When you choose all three topics, you cheat us and yourself out of a fully thought out piece. For example, we took out your "if life was a movie" piece altogether because it was too short to teach anything. One topic, not all three please.)

My Movie

If this world was a stage, I would have hella characters. It would start off me being a young buck following my big homies. Now that I look back on shhh, it seem like a movie. It was just three years ago when I smoked my first bleeze. Then shhh slowly started processing.

Now a ninja hustling, beefing, stealing cars, violating probation and shhh. So I would say that I am a villain. I say I am a villain because I lie, cheat, rob, and steal. But then at the same time, a ninja doing hella good.

-Lando U4

From The Beat: Oh come on, Lando. How can a liar, a cheat, a thief — and a prisoner — be "doing hella good?" If this is hella good, we'd hate to see what hella bad looks like! If you want to compare your life to a movie, we suggest you think of those movies you know, like "Menace II Society" and "Boys In The Hood." Remember what happened to those you cared about in those movies? Don't think it can't happen to you, because it can. The truth is, your life isn't a movie at all. It's real. And so is your blood, your pain, and your tears.

I'ma Be On The Right!

This time I'm gonna get it right, I'm gonna think about the future of my life. I'ma stop smoking an' doin' all those things (know what I mean?)

I'm almost 18. After that no more kiddy jail. Maybe the good thing is I could probably bail. But that not be my motive. I'ma get it right and be positive. I'm tired of getting high. I thought I needed weed every day just to get by, but I see that's not the way

I'm gonna get it together today. This place is not a game. I don't wanna be the high girl. That's not ma name. I'ma make my parents proud. I want them to say that my baby in the graduation around... I wanna have a happy long life. Maybe in the future I'll become a great wife.

-Ladonna U5

From The Beat: No, LaDonna, the good thing is not that you can get bail. Because after bail comes a trial — and too often, jail! The good thing is not doing the things that lead to your getting arrested in the first place. There's nothing good about being picked up by the cops, whether you get bail or not! But if you stick to the goals you've laid out here, then you will not only make your parents proud, you will make yourself proud. If you follow through, you can become a great wife — or a great anything else you set your mind to. Don't disappoint yourself.

New Year...

Damn ... I might have to spend my New Year in the halls. It's gonna be my first time, too. I regret what I did to get me in. Now both my parents and my brother have to spend it without me. It makes me sad, but I think it makes them sadder.

-Notorious Mk U4

From The Beat: It's a sign of maturity that you can see how your own actions have affected others, whether they want to be affected or not. (In the future, please choose only one topic and write a lot more about it. When you choose all three topics, all we get is a few sentences about each. We would rather see a longer piece about one. The Beat.)

Drugs

Drugs never put me in a situation where I don't have nowhere to go. But doing drugs actually changed me. I'm not no major drug user, but I use the drug that I use a lot. I used to smoke hella weed. Believe it or not, I started smoking weed at 11 years, and I'm 16 now. I used to smoke so much weed in one day.

I just got out of a group home, so I hadn't hit a blunt in a year and a half. I hit the blunt and never felt it like that before. I thought they made some new weed since I've been gone. But it's the same shhh I've been smoking, so I quit smoking.

I been popping pills and when came back home I started popping damn near every day. I pop, but it I don't even feel the same. I just be on some other shhh.

-Slim Looney U4

From The Beat: It's good that you are being honest with yourself because this is he only way that you will be able to grow as a self-reliant person. Now that you are in here without a drug to depend on, would you say that you really need its effects to function and get by? You've built a good foundation of clean and sober time. How will you build on it when you get out of here?

I Knew Santa Didn't Exist

I never believed in Santa Claus. Even when I was young, I knew Santa didn't exist. Santa was nothing but a fake old man.

-Daniel U3

From The Beat: If you didn't believe in Santa, did you believe in any "fake" holiday symbols, like the tooth fairy or the Easter Bunny. Did your family celebrate Chinese New Years or other holidays? Can you describe those celebrations?

Has The Hall Helped Me

What it do Beat? It's ya boy, JR. You asked has the hall helped me in any kind of way. I say no and I say yeah. First, I'ma start off wit' my yes. It's helped me to know what I'll not do. And the reason why I say no is 'cause all it does is keeps me away from my family, my thugs and da wife, ya feel m.

The halls ain't gave me a second chance. All it's doin' is setting me up for failure by sending me to these group homes that's like a 9 to 18 month program. I told myself if they gave me another chance to go home and do my time at home, I wouldn't be back here. So yeah, that's why I don't think they've helped me.

-Jr U4

From The Beat: Since already you know that the system is set up for you to fail, why would you do anything that you know would put you back in it? You have to deal with the reasons for being here and address those. If you promised you wouldn't come back here under some circumstances, why not make the same promise for all circumstances? You owe it to yourself to hold on to that most prized of birthrights: freedom!

All The Topics In One

My way out is going to school, just keeping me busy.
The last time I felt wanted was when my momma wanted me to do the dishes, right before I got in this shhh hole.
What's cold is the wind. Nothing else that I think is cold.
Santa never played a role in my life, because I knew he was fake all along.

-Phong U3

From The Beat: As you can see, Phong, we combined your four one-sentence pieces into a single piece. When you choose so many topics to write about, you really can't say much. We would much rather see you choose one topic, and write everything you can think of on it. That way, we get to know who you are, where you've been, and where you're going.

I Just Want To Be With My Family

Well, Santa Claus ain't real, but I would rather want to be in my house with my family, watching things about Christmas, instead of being locked up right here. I just want to be with my family and leave the bad past behind.

-Alfonso U3

From The Beat: You can leave the bad past behind — and the desire to do so is the beginning of success. We believe you will be able to celebrate next Christmas and every other holiday with your loving family. And if you keep the promise you've made to yourself, you'll be able to stay there!

No Way Out

It's no way out to me. Once you get in it, you have to stay in it, because it's not one thing you could do to stop someone you did something to from doing something to you. To me, I feel like I'm in too deep. No matter where I go, I got beef, so that's why I stay on the block.

-B. Wizz U3

From The Beat: We have two immediate reactions to you, BW. The first is that the longer you stay on the block, the deeper you go down that hole, making it all the harder to crawl out. The second is that we know far too many people with many more years under their belts and much more dirt under their fingernails who have made the difficult decision to cut their ties with the past and start anew to believe that there's no way out. They are now traveling down paths that — instead of leading to prison or the grave — take them to heights they never knew they could achieve. If you read The Beat Without, you will "meet" some of these OGs yourself, and realize that they have made tough choices to change rather than simply accept what they've always done. You can too.

All I Want For Christmas

What's good, Beat? This ya boy! Man, for real, all I want for Christmas is the charges dropped. I'm just tryna be home with the fame-bam. They could put ya boy on house arrest or whatever, just let me go home on probation, so I could get off probation.

Well, I got court this Thursday to see if that's about go down. I hope it do. I'm tryna move on. I can't be stuck in one spot forever. So 'til then, I'm a keep my head up and stay up, 'til they stretch me out and put me in a tux. Catch you on the next one, Beat.

-Da Carter U3

From The Beat: We hope you get your wish to go home, DC, but we hope even more that when you get out you'll keep the promise you make here to get off probation. That is not an easy goal to achieve, because many of your homies will try to get you to do things you know are not right, and it will take real strength of character on your part to remain their friends while, at the same time, telling them, "No, thank you." We admire your decision to "move on," but what's your plan for that journey?

Police Hatin' On Ya Boy

My way out is to first get off probation, so these punks could get off ya boy windshield wipers, ya feel me? And get that nice education to get around in life, so I could get a job, so when them hatin'-ass black and whites stop me, I got them papers to make them hate on ya boy.

-Twon U3

From The Beat: If you've got that "nice education" and a job, why would those black and whites stop you? Your goals are great — get off probation and go to school — but one of the things that makes them great is that they should lead to the end of all entanglements with the law!

I've Felt Wanted

I've always felt wanted: my girlfriend wants me, my parents care for me, that's why I shouldn't be in here.

-Jose U3

From The Beat: You're right, Jose. Now it's time to pay their love and support back by following through on your goals!

Probation Is A Set Up

My way to get out of the system is just don't fall for the trap that system set up for you. Probation is a trap that was set up by system to make you come back, so I'm not going to violate the probation and stay out of hall.

-Daniel U3

From The Beat: Good for you, Daniel! If you're right and the system is designed for you to fail, then the best revenge is to succeed! Now go do it!

Why I Became A Hustler

To tell you the truth, I don't think I would be able to get out of a hustla's life because for me, it is hella hard to get a regular job. So I just became a hustla so I can get my money, and so I can have what I want in life, since no one cares what I do.

-Young Magic U4

From The Beat: The halls, the jails and all the prisons are filled to the rafters with hustlers who thought that they could get away with their hustle. If you became a hustler to "have what you want in life," then we guess you also want what you have now — a life under the control of strangers, wearing other boys' drawe's, and being separated from females and all that you love. This comes with the hustler's territory, so get used to it. If "no one cares," what about you? Do you care?

My Mama Was Always Our Family's Santa

Ain't no Santa in my life. For as long as I can remember, my mama got me and my brothers everything that was under the tree. An' plus I don't like pimps and Santa is the biggest one there ever was and will be, because he got everybody and they mama callin' each other hos — ha ha ha ha.

Naw, but on the real, I don't believe the fat white guy with the beard and a red suit that they call Santa, 'cause if it is a real Santa, why after Christmas, ya mama hella broke? Think about it, brah! Is he real? I think not.

-Young Ant U3

From The Beat: That ho, ho, ho line is very funny, Young Ant. We're still laughing. But there's also something very serious in what you've written. The Santa that has provided everything for you — from food to fun — is your mom, and you owe her a lot for playing Santa in your life. We don't think she wants "things" from you (cars, houses, gifts). She wants you in her life. That would be a gift worth more than all the diamonds in the world. Can you give it to her?

A Cold Juvenile Hall Christmas

What's cold is that we have to spend Christmas in here. It's really bad because Christmas in here, it's just different from the outs. If I was outside, I would be able to do whatever I want, even Christmas. I had plans for Christmas, but now I'm locked up. I'm gonna have to spend Christmas eating jail food.

In my room, it's cold, but the staff won't give me no more than two blankets. So it's really cold to spend Christmas in here.

-Ramon U3

From The Beat: It sounds like you've spent Christmas in juvy before. If so, we guess you didn't hate it enough to keep yourself out... Jail food may be nasty, Ramon, but at least you won't be hungry as so many people in the world are every day. Which makes you colder, not having that extra blanket in your room, or just being here at all?

Getting Out Of The Bad Life

My plan to get out of the bad life is to stay in school. I will also want to spend a lot of time with my family.

-Alfonso U3

From The Beat: We applaud you for these decisions, Alfonso. School and family are the keys to a better future. But tell us, what are you going to do when those temptations come your way and you have to say no to a homie? Will you have the courage for it?

Something Stupid

My way out for this case is... I don't know, because it's really not my fault. I got caught for something stupid, like gambling and stolen properties.

Well, I'm screwing myself up, too. But I know what I gotta do to get out without any problem. So that I'm just writing because I feel like I got to send this out. Well, if anyone knows me, you should. Just keep your heads up and I miss you punks. Peace.

-Michael U3

From The Beat: How is getting caught with stolen property not your fault? For the person who worked hard for that property that you were illegally in possession of, it wasn't "stupid" at all, it was serious. It should be serious to you, too. You say you know what you have to do, but you don't give us a clue as to what that is. So, where will you be in a year's time, and how will you get there from here?

What's Very Cold

The thing that's very cold is people getting shot, and your family members crying and your mother is stressing and you in here for Christmas — now that is very cold. Your girlfriend leaves you, you go to a group home, people taking your clothes and you feeling like hurting somebody. And when you not there to see your lil' sister grow up — that's very cold.

-Delvonta U3

From The Beat: The all above things are really cold, Delvonta, so it would seem to us that instead of acting on that desire to hurt somebody, you make the difficult choice to change just one person... What you describe as very cold tells us that you have a warm heart, so how can you use that warmth in your own life to change this sad picture?

My Way Out Is To Get Out

My way out is to get out, you feel me? I don't want to be here. I miss my family the most. I wanna kick wit' the homies from my set. I wanna get out because it makes me wanna go loco (crazy), 'cause I only could see my mom, not my dad or bother an' sister. I feel like I'm an animal, locked up in a room. All I could do is sleep, poop, and eat. So I wanna get out of here.

-Devone U3

From The Beat: Sure, you want to get out, Devone. Who doesn't? But when you tell us that you "wanna kick wit' the homies from my set," you're also telling us that you're willing to accept all the possible consequences that go with that choice. Being here is one of those consequences, and a minor one when you compare it to others. You will get out, Devone, but will you stay out? That's a choice you'll have to make, but your focus doesn't give us a lot of reason to hope.

Feeling Wanted In By The Wrong Folks

The last time I felt wanted? Man, the last time I felt wanted was when I got locked up in here. Now I'm wanted by family, girlfriends, and friends.

But when on the outs, I didn't feel that way. I always felted like I had to look over my shoulder and didn't feel wanted. But now I feel love al over between family, girlfriends, and friends.

-Young Green U4

From The Beat: Well, if you always had to look over your shoulder, you did feel wanted... only the people that wanted you didn't have your best interests at heart. Our question is, do you have your own best interests at heart? And if you do, what will you do different on the outs to honor the loved ones who want you?

Being Locked Up Is Cold

What's cold is that I'm locked up staring at the mildew walls in my room. What's cold is that I'm taking showers with other ninjas. What's cold is starving. What's cold is three-minute phone calls. What's cold is waking up in the morning looking at staff bangin' to get up and brush my teeth. What's cold is getting ready to go to the new juvenile and expecting it to look like a mini San Quentin for the youths.

-Young G U4

From The Beat: Well, now that you're in the new juvenile hall, at least you don't have mildew on your walls... Is the new place better than the old? We're guessing that no matter how modern the jail, it's still a cold place to be. But is it cold enough to make you stay out of it? If this is not your first time here, then apparently you weren't chilled enough those other times to make you want to stay away.

I'm Making My Family Worry

What's cold is I'm in here and I'm making my family and loved ones worry. What's cold is that we only have one blanket and it's freezing at night.

-Jose U3

From The Beat: Of these two different kinds of cold, which is the easier to change and provide some warmth to?

No Santa

I always knew it was my mom; it was always my mom working to give me something.

-Jose U3

From The Beat: Yes, your mom has been your "Santa" throughout your life, giving you food, clothes, gifts, a warm place to live. Time to give her some milk and cookies without waiting for her to come down the chimney! (Jose, you are a good writer and a good thinker. Please take just one topic next time and give us the benefit of all your intelligence and thinking, so that we get a better picture of who you are and who you want to be. When you choose so many topics to write on, you cheat us out of getting to know you. Thanks.)

No Gold Spoon In My Mouth

I wasn't born with a gold spoon in ma mouth
Once you in this shhh maybe it ain't no way out
That shhh can get you shot with no doubt
Don't get caught maybe wit'out...
'Cause now days it's called slippin'
Black scrape pull up and ninjas get to spittin'

-Doddie U3

From The Beat: We know a lot of people who were born poor but who made different choices from those you've been making, and who don't have to stay strapped to walk the streets of their communities. Yes, the circumstances of your birth and upbringing make it harder to succeed than if you'd been born rich. But if we were nothing more than our pasts, none of us would achieve anything! We call "slippin'" not getting your education, and therefore keeping yourself from moving past the spot you now occupy.

No Santa

When I was growing up I didn't believe in Santa because I grew up in a Chinese family. I guess the only Santa was my parents.

-Notorious Mk U4

From The Beat: Yes, your parents are your Santa, and they are owed a great deal for all their sacrifices for you. Time to return the favors! (Next time, MK, please take just one topic instead of all three so we can get the benefit of your thinking in depth, and not just on the surface.)

Three In One

My way out is to go to school or get my mind into playing basketball, instead of chilling on the block with my homies. My way out is to get a job.

The last time I felt wanted was when my auntie came to visit me, but that feeling didn't really last long because after that she didn't come visit me anymore.

What's cold? My life is cold. The world is cold because it's full of hate, which I'm thinking because I been shot at before.

-Gutta U4

From The Beat: The first thing we want to say is that by writing on all three topics, you cheat us out of anything meaningful. You wrote no more than two sentences about each topic, and you can't really tell us much in two sentences. So, from now on, please choose only one topic to write about, and write all you can about that one topic. What kind of job are you hoping to get to stay off the block? Life is all we've got, G, so if you put yourself in places where you can get shot at, you're risking everything. And for what?

My Plans To Stay Out

My way out is do my time and do not come back, do not play with guns, and stay with family and be low key with whatever I do and do not sell drugs. When I am out, I will play sports and go to work. I will be on the block but not all night.

-Bruce U4

From The Beat: There are some very important goals and promises you make here that will help your life, if you follow through. Not carrying a gun and not selling drugs are at the top of that list of great goals. But your intention to go back to the block ("but not all night") is like a prescription for failure. How long do you think it will be before something jumps off that sweeps you in? How long will it be before that lure of easy money seduces you again? How long will it be before you forget how much you hated it here, and find yourself back in the box? It's your life. Think very carefully about it.

I Got To Stay In School

My way out is to do what I got to do to stay in school.

-Jb U3

From The Beat: That's the beginning of a plan, and we want to encourage you to follow through. As to the other piece you wrote, leave that stuff on the bathroom walls, and respect The Beat, please.

The New Halls

Man, the new halls... it's not cool over there. Tears and shhh like we in the real pen or something. Man, they treatin' us like we real criminals in here.

They sayin' no more outside, no more volleyball or nothin'. I'm tryin' to get out before we go over there man. The new halls.

-D U4

From The Beat: Well, now that you are over there, we'd like you to tell us whether the reality is the same as what you expected. Is it as bad as you thought?

Wanted

The last time I felt wanted is when I was in the halls in the summer and my homies needed me for some business. but I was in here.

-Big S U4

From The Beat: That business you were "wanted" for would only have led you right back to where you are right now. When are you going to start thinking about you, your future, and what you owe those who truly love you?

The Last Time I Felt Wanted

I'm feeling wanted, now that I'm in the halls. My family is wanting me to come now. I feel that now that I am locked up and away. I feel more wanted because I'm not around like I used to be anymore.

-Moncure U4

From The Beat: Isn't it interesting that it took you getting locked up to feel wanted at home. Now that you know that you are, how will it change you when you get there?

What's cold is that I'm locked up staring at the mildew walls in my room.

What's Cold?

What's cold is seeing your mom or any female getting beat. That is cold as hell!

-Notorious Mk U4

From The Beat: We live in a society that disrespects women. When boys are raised to use the "B" word for girls, whether they know it or not, each time they use that word, they are describing their mothers, their sisters, their aunties, their lovers. Yes, it's cold as hell!

Cold As Ice

What's cold is when you in the halls on the holidays. What's cold is when you find out the homey got something tight for Christmas.

What's cold is when you family miss you on the holidays.

-Big S U4

From The Beat: What's cold is that you could have avoided all this by not giving the system the power to take you from the warmth of your loved ones. What's even colder is not learning this lesson in time to make a change, so that you don't have to be so cold in the future.

What's Cold

Something that is cold is my dad. He used to sell my clothes and my toys and hella shhh for crack, heroine, PCP and hella other drug. He scandalous because he love his drugs more than his kids.

-Kasadie U5

From The Beat: Yes, it's scandalous when a parent forsakes his children for anything else, whether it's drugs, his boys, the block, or whatever. He has forfeited his right to the title "Father" (which requires a lot more than contributing his DNA). On the other hand, addiction is a disease, and while you're under the control of that chemical, nothing else really matters until you seek a way out of that slavery. We're not asking you to forgive him, only to understand that he is a sick man.

Life

Life is no game. Many people look at life as a game. I've been locked up for almost three months lookin' at life. Time passed me by, seen many people come and out. That's life.

-Bucka Bucka U6

From The Beat: You start several different trains of thought here, but you don't follow any of them anywhere. Yes, many people look at life as a game. You don't. Why not? How did you learn it wasn't a game? What changes will this understanding bring in your life? Yes, many people come and go. What does this mean? How does it make you feel? Will you be one of them? "That's life" is a lazy way out of having to think about things and try to explain them — if not to us, then to yourself. We want more, and we know you're very capable of more.

What Is Your Way Out?

My way out is pontificating my life to those that been through the stuff that I been through. My way out is to scream and shout, but when things go wrong I don't pout.

-Rosevette G4

From The Beat: Come on, Rosevette. This is a little too cute. We know you're capable of much more. In what way is this a "plan" for a way out? We don't see it. Do you?

When Mom Died

The last time I felt wanted? When I was at my house with my mother. When she died I had nothin' and no one for me. I thought my life was over.

She told me she was dyin' in the last minute. I was mad as hell it turn out this way, but I think about her all the time. But a ninja in jail. This jail can't stop me at all. I'm the same like always. You know me, man! You know me, man!

-Cornelious U4

From The Beat: We feel so sorry that you have lost your mom, Cornelious, especially because we can see that you are still very much a child in need of a mother's love and guidance. When you say, "This jail can't stop me at all," you're thinking like a child, and truly at your age, you should be immature. But also at your age, you should be looking into the future and asking yourself what kind of life you want. You can, of course, just keep doing what you're doing, but don't be so foolish to think that you can't be stopped. There are more than 29,000 people in California serving life sentences, more than 3,400 serving life sentences without the possibility of parole, and more than 650 waiting on death row... That's more than 33,000 people, all of whom once thought just like you. Still think you can't be stopped?

The Lat Time I Felt Wanted...

The last time I felt wanted was when I was at home with my baby and she told me she loved me. Another time was when I talked to her on the phone and she told me she missed me and to come home. So that's the last time when I felt wanted.

-Christine U5

From The Beat: Shouldn't that be an encouragement to change the life style you are living and go home to your baby? You made the choices you did that let the system remove you from your one and only responsibility as a mother — to be there for your daughter. You may not know it, but that was a way of saying you wanted something more than her. That is a painful thing to think about, but unless you do think about it, you'll never get your priorities straight. Bringing a child into the world when you can't (or won't) be there for her is an act of irresponsibility. You owe both your child and yourself much, much more. Time to be responsible.

In And Out

Every day I see people come in and out! Many people come in and when they come out they come right back, in less than a month. I don't want to be none of those people. It took me a while to realize that this is not the place to be because this place made me hurt a lot of people like my parents and girl friend.

-Kwes U6

From The Beat: It's painful to realize it, but it's not this place that made you hurt a lot of people. It's you who took whatever actions you took to lead you here that hurt a lot of people. Luckily, this is a situation you can reverse. You have it in your power to make your family — and yourself — proud of who you are and what you do.

What Is Your Way Out?

I really don't know what is my way out 'cause this is my first time. So I've been thinking lately that when I get out, I am going to use what I learned in here, out there. So hopefully I am not comin' back here. I'm goin' to try to stay out 'cause in here, this ain't cool man. For real. Man, I am tired of people telling me when to go to sleep. I want to hit a 'Port or two.

Man, let this be a lesson learned 'cause, man,, I'm hella young, and my mama missin' me. She needs me, but I'm holding it down 'till I get out. Then when I get out, man it's on and crackin.' 'Till then, you gonna see me "ballin!" But I need to get right. I got to get with it, or get lost.

-Lil' Miss Y U5

From The Beat: Yes, your mom needs you, and you also need her. The hall is not a substitute for a loving mother. It's up to you, now, to give back some of what she has sacrificed for you. We like the beginning of this piece more than the end, because at the end you begin sounding like a little girl instead of a mature young woman. Don't worry about "it's on," or "it's crackin'," or your "ballin'!" All those descriptions continue to keep you glued to your little girl past. Look to the future, and keep to your promise never to come back! That puts you on the road to a responsible adulthood.

Where Did I Go Wrong?

Why do it gotta be me sittin' up in here 'til January 17?
It's a cold world out there, but nobody cares.
My girl got sent back to New York, I said wasn't fair
I cried my eyes out constantly,
but when I found the real reason why she got sent back
I'm like, "Why would you do that to me?
I was so in love wit' you
And you so beautiful
But 'dis news I got it's so crucial
And now I don't even want to be with you
I thought you was my queen, my Cinderella
But when I get sent ta YGC and you don't hear from me
You laid with the next fella.

-Lil' Soulja U5

From The Beat: We thought from the title of this piece that you'd explore your own past mistakes as a way of changing your future. Instead, you boo-hoo about someone you thought you loved (and thought loved you), but who you were quite willing to leave behind while you did whatever it was that landed you behind these walls. You showed her that she was not the most important thing in your life by letting yourself be taken from her. You're experiencing the consequences of your own choices. There are all kinds of ways to define "cheating." We think you cheated on her first when you decided that your boys were more important.

The Only Way Out

The only way I can get out from what I am doin' is goin' back to my family. If I don't go to my family, I am goin' to keep doin' what I am doin' and I am goin' to stay lovin' my daddy Goldie and stay steppin' my game up and still makin' his money. Why I want keep on doin' what I am doin' because it the game and it is fun. It is fun because it is the way I feel and I am stay steppin' up my game.

-Lil' Goldie U5

From The Beat: We read your piece and are reminded of that cell phone commercial, "Can you hear me now?" Except the question we want to ask is, "Are you having fun now?" because this is the life you get when you "stop up your game." Only a child (or an insane person) thinks she can do the same thing as before without facing the same (or worse) consequences as before. So take your choice, are you a child or are you insane?

Got To Get Out

I need to get the hell out of here. I don't know why my moms is tryin' to leave me in here. I hope she will change her mind and let me come back home. If not then I hope my dad will let me live with him.

-Henry U6

From The Beat: Are you being truly honest, Henry, when you say you don't know why your moms doesn't want you to come home? What's missing in this short piece (that you had almost an hour to think about) is any sense of personal responsibility for where you are or why you can't go home. That's the part you'd better put some thought to. If you don't, you won't be staying long wherever you go...

So I've been thinking lately that when I get out, I am going to use what I learned in here, out there.

Mind Games

Man! Girl, why you keep playing mind games wit' me? I used to believe truly that you was a real woman. You always told yo' girls that you love me and want our future two grow, and how you want kids in that big picture of us in it!

Man, word used to mean a lot to me, but that's all it is now, just words wit' no real feeling in it at all. My mind used to be stuck on you, but ever since my brah told me that he seen you wit' another dude, I got mad and started thinking why you talk so good, then I find out that it's games. And when you do it to me you start playin' mind games. Why? Why, when I gave you my heart!

-Macky-O U6

From The Beat: Of course it hurts when love turns out to be something else, something less. But you have to take some responsibility for this outcome yourself. After all, you were not thinking of how much you love her when you decided to do something that gave power to the system to take you from her. In short, you left her before she left you, whatever you're feeling. It's not easy being a young man or a young woman, so we hope you think of this from her point of view, and cut her some slack. Who knows what might happen when you get out of here — but whatever happens, unless you learn to stay out of here, you're likely to experience even more broken relationships.

Wanted

The last time I felt wanted was when I had a warrant.

-Chicano U6

From The Beat: If this is all you could come up with during an hour's workshop, it's not clear to us that you even want you. Come on, little boy. Time to get serious!

My Life

What's good Beat? Hi, how is everybody out there? Man, it's me, Young Flat Head. I'm just so happy to be here. Well, I'm just going to tell you about how my life is today.

Well, I am in here trying to make something out of myself, feel me. But something is trying to hold me back, but I got to hold on to what I got now. See me, I'm not what you think about me. I'm somebody you can have fun with, but little did you know, I'm somebody that will take whatever I want, but that is just if you play me.

People think that I'm some person that lives in the ghetto and wasting my time, but that's not me, I'm really a person that is friendly person that you can count on. Its just me.

-Flat Head U6

From The Beat: Well, if you're a person who takes what he wants when he's played, are you taking what you want right now? What do you want? What's your plan for getting it?

I'm Gone

They say actions speak louder than words, so what I'm going to do is have to show you that this is my first and my last time. And I'm not just saying that. I can't wait to show that I'm not playing, that I'm serious, because this ain't where I want to be, wearing somebody panties, bras, pants, and shirt.

Hell naw! That ain't the code.

The next thing I might have an infection 'cause those clothing mixed up and other people wearing anything that's just nasty. I don't know how they do it. That's why I can't wait to show that this is my first and my last time! 'Bout time I'm gone this must be in The Beat.

-Young Weezy U5

From The Beat: Yes, actions do speak louder than words. You've written some powerful words here, and we appreciate them. But it's what you do and not what you say that will matter, so we expect you to follow through... Some people do learn from their first time in the halls that nothing is worth this. We hope you're one of those people. It's up to you...

Who I'm Missing

This time I'll write about how I miss my family and my freedom. My older sister just came to San Francisco a few weeks ago and I haven't seen her. The last time I saw her was when I was just into my teens. Now I'm 16 years old.

I been here for two months. I just want to get out and see my family again. I been here two times. Now I know what it is to be here. When I was out, I thought it was easy to be here but this ain't fun no more.

Now, I just want to get out and finish my probation. Now I got to go 'cause I'm on split program and I'm about to go to the room. The longest I been out of my room is for an hour a day, and that is not coo'. That's why when I get out from this place I'll try to be good.

-Victor U6

From The Beat: When you say you'll "try to be good" when you get out, what, exactly, do you mean? Without a plan, this becomes an empty hope. Wanting to do good is not enough; you have to decide specifically what you plan to change — meaning, what you will not do when you're free. So, tell us. What changes do you see in your life when you walk out of here?

Giving In To Temptation

The last time I felt wanted? This female wanted me hecka bad, but I had a girl already. She don't care though. That day we was hanging out with each other at the Century 21. Then we went to my house to have some fun.

-Terrell U7

From The Beat: Well, if you already had a girl and you still went off with another girl "to have some fun," then it's pretty clear you it wasn't just that new girl who didn't about your girl; you didn't either. Sometimes, that momentary "fun" can lead to long-term heartache and regret. Think about it.

Feeling Wanted

The last time I felt wanted, I wanted to break down because I am locked up. Shhh! It sucks being locked up for something I didn't do. They didn't find no evidence on me and now they're going to lock me up for Christmas and New Years ! Sigh.

It sucks lying there at night looking at an empty cell with four walls surrounding you. I hate this. I wish I never got into this so I can spend Christmas with my family and friends.

Now I feel even worse because my mom and dad has to come visit me every day and show up to my court days. I feel even worse for this. I feel like I'm a worthless child until I turn my life around.

-James U6

From The Beat: Okay, James, we see two messages here. One is that you didn't do what you're charged with, and that makes it even harder to be locked up. But the other is that, even if you're innocent of this charge, you have been living your life in a way that disrespects your parents (who continue to stand by you) and messes up your future. We think it is that second message which you should focus on. You will get out of this situation, one way or the other. But what happens after that depends on what you do — and what you don't do...

Trying My Hardest

Damn! Christmas is coming up and I am not going to be spending it with my family. I am trying everything I can to get out. I am about to go to step four. I participate in many programs to help me out! Just being hurts me because I know how many people I hurt, for instance my family, friends and girl friends.

-Kwes U6

From The Beat: We admire you for taking advantage of whatever is offered to help yourself. That's excellent preparation for the future. Once you do get out, we hope you put all that energy you've spent trying to get out into staying out. Getting out's the easy part.

Not A Hustler

My way out of the gangster life is hard to explain because I never hustled or gangbanged in my life. I'm not a gangster so I wouldn't know how to get out of the criminal justice system.

-James U6

From The Beat: So, you don't hustle and you don't bang. But you do know what led you here, don't you? Then you should have a good idea what you have to stop doing in order to lead yourself away from here...

Shine Like The Sun

What it do Beat? This Lil' Scari aka da Youngsta. Man, I'm 'bout to do three months fo' some shhh I ain't do, feel. But it's good, I'm 'bout out in two. I be out fo' the summer an' when I do, I'm go shine like the sun.

-S-Scoot U6

From The Beat: It sure seems like a lot of young people didn't do what they're charged with... But whether that's true or not, we don't see any evidence in this piece that you think anything is worthy of change in your life. How do you plan to "shine like the sun?" the answer to that question may well determine if you plan on coming back, or not...

Playing

Dear Santa,

For Christmas I want a PS3 for I can play, and stay out of trouble.

-Jason U6

From The Beat: That's it? After an hour's workshop, this is all you could come up with? Seems like, whether you have a PS3 or not, you're still playing. Play is important, but without some serious thought about your life and what you want from it, your play is not likely to lead you out of trouble. There's a time to put away childish things. That time is now!

Got Transferred

Man, Beat, I just did two months in Alameda County and they transferred me to San Francisco County. Man, dis shhh get tired after a while.

-Swiffle Boy Ken U6

From The Beat: This would "get tired" for us after the first time. How many times will it take for you to get so tired that you stop putting yourself here?

My Way Out

My way out is my baby. I'm due in early March, and I feel that she is going to be the one thing to make me feel that I need to change. My baby will make me want to change because I been through the shhh when I was little and I wouldn't want my child to go through the same thing.

But at the same time, once you're in, you're in, and the only way out is in a wooden box. All my family is affiliated.. my brothers, my sisters, my cousins even my dad is. My grandma was even affiliated back in the '40s during the Pachuco riots. So getting out will 'cause my whole family to disown me. but as long as I have God, my daughters and me I should be all right.

-Guerra U5

From The Beat: You know, Guerra, everyone one of us in a life in which the only way out is in a wooden box. The question is how long before we get there, and how we want to live before it arrives. You say that your who family will disown you if you become unaffiliated, but that is not true. Your daughter will love you all the more, because she will understand that you did what a real mother must do — sacrifice her own desires for the benefit of her child. Your real family now needs you more than ever. If your family has been affiliated for generations, then they've all followed in someone else's footsteps. Why not be the first in your family to break the cycle, and be a leader instead of a follower? Think of your baby, and you'll know what's right... and what's not.

No Place Like Home

There's no place like home
San Francisco is where I belong
Pulling licks, selling bricks money flips
Running loose, stacking chips
Destroying clicks
Now you know where the money
And the real ninjas be
Come and take a trip to this city
And you'll see that my ninjas are real
Beasts smoking tress popping thizz
Serving fiends, selling dreams
Money making machines

-Lil' Lazy, U7

From The Beat: We almost cut this entire piece, instead of just the most stupid parts of it (which is most of it), but we decided it was worth keeping enough of it to be able to respond. Oh, yeah, we know where the real money is, but apparently you don't. You're stacking the real money right now by choosing to come into this system. You're making a lot of people a lot richer, giving a lot of people work, and greasing the criminal justice system which already devours billions of dollars that could go to schools, to communities, to building instead of destroying. Although we want you to teach, we don't want you to teach stupid stuff. The fact that you are here and still bragging about the life that brought you here — and still prancing around like a proud peacock for all the dirt you and your boys do — tells us that you're not ready to teach anything worthwhile. You are far more in need of a teacher yourself. We don't know what it will take for you to understand just how much the system loves having you do what you do, just how much they laugh when they read a piece like this, knowing you are putting steak on their table. We hope it doesn't take years as a slave inside a system that cares nothing for you for you to understand how valuable life and freedom are, but it doesn't much matter what we hope. It's what you hope that counts. You may think we're hating on you, but all we're doing is keeping it real. The "dreams" you and your boys are selling are truly nightmares, and the worst part of it is that you're still sleeping.

Yes To School, No To Drugs

My way out is to go to school and stay focused so I won't do drugs. Hang with good crowds of people/friends. I need to set goals and expectations for myself, like going to college, focusing on my academics, or focusing on rebuilding the relationships with the people that I don't get along with. I need to work on socializing with the right type of people.

Mainly it's just me, myself, and I. Because everyone already knows I ain't gonna listen to nobody but myself. The only way for someone to change is if they want to change, then I will change, but if I don't plan to, I won't.

-Cc U5

From The Beat: The beginning of this piece tells us that you already have set goals and expectations for yourself. Now it's up to you to meet them. The end of the piece, however, goes a little off the tracks when you say you "ain't gonna listen to nobody" but yourself. Of course, if you're not ready to change, you won't. But that's not the same thing as saying that you don't have to listen to others. Many people have had experiences that you can benefit from hearing about, so don't fall into the childish trap of thinking you can get through this world without relying on the help of others. No human being who ever lived can do that, and neither can you. You've got a plan for success here, CC. Don't disappoint yourself.

My Cell Is Cold

What is cold is my cell. Just thinking about it is cold. I wish someone can take me out of the cell and set it afire so I can get warm. It is still very cold. I'm just waiting for it to get warm. The end!

-White Boi U7

From The Beat: There is someone who can take you out of that cold cell, and you know who that someone is. After all, the same someone put you in it...

Missing Out

What it do be be? It's me, Young Tweety, once again, sitting my ass right here. I just want to let you know that I miss my baby mama and my little baby boy. Pero tambien extreno ami morra que me esta esperando, pero no te preocupes mija, nos vemos (but I also miss my love waiting for me, but don't worry, I'll see you) next year. I'm out.

-Young Tweety U7

From The Beat: Getting out is the easy part, as we often say. If you miss your young family enough, you will stay out. If you come back, you didn't miss them enough. It's that simple!

But I'm here, stuck — no snacks, no freedom, and worst of all no girls to talk to, all because I make stupid decisions.

Last Time Here

My way out is to be out by Friday, and when I get out I am going to stay out. I do not want to be here move times than I had. When I do make it out, I am going to my grandmother's house to go cry to her ...

-Salvador U6

From The Beat: We can see that you didn't finish this piece (though you had nearly an hour to write!), so we have little to respond to. Besides crying to your grandmother, what else do you plan to do to keep your promise to stay out?

Another Christmas Locked Up

This yo' boy Fat Thug. I'm go be locked up for another Christmas again.

-Fat T U7

From The Beat: We're sorry you spent another Christmas locked up, FT. But in a one-hour workshop, if this is all you can come up with, you might want to add the word "Lazy" to your name...

Getting Drunk And Stupid

What was I doin' back here? I was supposed to be free. I was supposed to be in the outs kicking it with my boys getting drunk. I could've been out on top of my game, making bread. But I'm here, stuck — no snacks, no freedom, and worst of all no girls to talk to, all because I make stupid decisions. I ain't gonna say what but it was a stupid dumb-ass thing.

Now I'm here writing for The Beat Within because I don't want to be stuck in my room. Now I'm here not free when I could've been with all my friends and in clean drawers. It feels hella weak that I'm not out and missing all the things all my boys are doing. But I guess I just gotta do the time and I know I'll get out soon so it's all good, but it still weak up in here.

-Smeego U6

From The Beat: You know, Smeego, you put yourself here. One might even look at your choices and conclude that your boys are more important to you than those girls you claim to miss. You're making bread right now, but look whose pockets it's going into! We're not sure you've correctly identified the truly "stupid decisions" you've made. You're focused entirely on the "crime" that led you here. We suggest you focus instead on the drinking that led to the crime — and will continue to spiral your life downwards, until you take back control. Alcoholism is a sinister sickness because it's so easy to convince ourselves that we don't have a problem. Until you are honest enough to recognize that you do have a problem, then it's certainly not "all good." Yes, you'll be out soon, but if your focus continues to be getting drunk with your boys, you'll soon be back in one box or another...

My Man Stank!

Something that is cold is my ninja, hella old
I thought he was young so I got sprung
But now I know he ain't young and he worn out and run
Like the tired ass-rag he is pumpin' up on a hag
He is weak as hell, old and stuck
Preyin' on young girls, hopin' he can get a twirl
But he can't; he stank.

-Kasadie U5

From The Beat: If "your ninja" is hella weak, what does that make you? Come on girl, this is the oldest game in the world, and it hurts us to think that you don't have enough self-assurance and self-respect to find a way to stand on your own. That's what adults do. It's time to think about becoming one.

Me, Myself And Rosevette

All I do is pop, eat, sleep, fight and screw
I want to change
But when I try it feels strange
I mean it's not that hard
When I try to do right, I feel like a retard
Beat, I know what you go'n say
But when I'm in my room I do pray for a better day
And I know that God'll make it okay
My, myself, and Rosevette
Go'n make it in this messed up world
'Cause I have a lot of self-esteem
And I have great dreams
I'm go be that female
Walking down the aisle with a diamond ring

-Rosevette G4

From The Beat: There are more important goals to seek than walking down the aisle with a diamond ring, Rosevette. You say you feel like a retard when you try to do right, but how do you feel when you have to ask to use the bathroom? You say you pray to God for guidance, but has it occurred to you that God has answered you by guiding you into YGC — a way of God telling you that unless you walk down the path He laid out for you, you're going to end in a bad way? It's not enough to pray. You have to listen to the prayers He has for you, too. If you disrespect God by disrespecting His creations (most especially yourself), what do you expect from Him?

What's Cold

What's cold is having to be locked up for Christmas and New Year
What's cold is having to wear other people clothes and underwear
What's cold is having to be away from my baby mama
What's cold is having to be away from my family
What's cold is having to be away from everything outside these walls
What's cold is having to watch my back in the shower
What's cold is not being able to touch a female in here
What's cold is having to eat this nasty-ass food
That's cold to me!

-Armond U4

From The Beat: You are absolutely right; being locked up in juvenile hall (or any jail) can be a very cold experience, both literally (not enough blankets) and emotionally (no females, no children, no parents). But what is so cold to us is that you put yourself in this situation. What will it take for you to hold on to your freedom — and the warmth of your loved ones — when you walk out of here?

Changing For My Girlfriend

My way of being better is just try to do what I got to do in life, by going to school and listening to the teachers. The other way out for me is stopping disappointing my parents, my whole family, and most important, my girlfriend. The reason for my changes in life is for my girlfriend.

-Jacky U3

From The Beat: It's great that your girlfriend is causing you to change, but the best reason to change is for yourself and for your future. Don't forget this promise!

A Long Story Short

To all my ninjas in here from U2 to U7, check this out, I'm getting out Friday, Dec. 22, '06. I'ma get some buns ya dig, but check it out. Playboys, y'all keep ya head up and keep it moving. Life is too short to live. Do yo time. It ain't shhh. You not just hurting yourself but yo' loved ones too, feel me.

I can't wait till I get out. I'ma do what I do and keep it moving on.

-Jeremiah U7

From The Beat: It's what you do to bring yourself into this system that hurts you and your loved ones. So, when you say you're going to do what you do and keep it moving, what, exactly, do you have in mind. If we see you here again, we'll know. If we don't, we'll applaud! (You should have called this piece "A Short Long Story" 'cause it's mighty short...)

What's Cold?

What's up with The Beat? Man, cold to me is when somebody snitches, 'cause to me, snitchin' is the worst thing you can do. Say if yo' best friend snitch, that's leavin' you out in the cold. You never snitch, not even on yo' worst enemies.

-D U4

From The Beat: So, if you knew of a child who was sexually molested by an adult, you wouldn't tell? Maybe it's just the word "snitch" that makes you believe it's "the worst thing." Are there any situations which you think it's justified to talk about? At the same time, we have to remind you that if you didn't do dirt, nobody would have anything to snitch on you about. It starts with you!

Real World

Life to be free,
yep I wish that was me,
rather be with my family
instead of YGC.
I can't call this place home because I don't live here,
I don't feel any love or compassion.
I live in the projects but it feel like I live a mansion.
It's true, I'm a black girl living in the 'hood,
but that don't mean my life is not going to be good.
If I had a chance to start over I would if I could.
I miss how I used to live before I got here,
how my life is so terrorized and so full of fear.
It's not that I'm a scary girl,
It's just that I didn't know how I would end up in this world.
I used to take this as a joke,
I'm not dead yet but I feel like I coughed up an' choked...

-Young-Nae U5

From The Beat: You DO have a chance to start over, especially now that you have seen where this life lands you. When you say you used to take life as a joke, does that mean that from this point on, things will be different? We hope so, because that is exactly how you can start over. Tell us what you predict will be different in your life the next time you are free.

The Hall Taught Me Not To Come Back

Yeah, the hall helped me. The hall taught me a lesson to not come back. It's hella nasty up in here. I don't like it up in here, because I miss my family. It's not even worth it to come in dis shhh. I'm never robbing peeps again. It's not worth coming up in here again, so the halls taught me a lesson. I'm a start going to school and do my work.

-Devone U3

From The Beat: There many reasons not to rob people, Devone, besides these ugly consequences. Taking what others have worked hard to earn is simply being a parasite, like a tick or a leach living off the blood of others. It's not right, and we don't think you could justify it. Your decision to go back to school is the right one, and puts you on a very different path with a much better destination than the one you have been heading towards. Good luck.

One Choice: Two Outcomes

Juvinile Hall has done nothing for me. Every time I come in here, things get worse and worse. Now I have only one choice with two outcomes. The one choice I have is to stay in here. If I don't have my baby, I get referred to CYA. But if I do have her, I go home.

But now that I have been having contractions, it's probably CYA for me. I really don't think that CYA's "rehabilitation Services" will work for me. For a 15-year-old with two kids, it's kind of hard to change, especially when you can't get no job and don't want to see your child starve. But hopefully I get another chance

-Guerra U5

From The Beat: We feel very sorry that you are facing these bad choices (which you brought on yourself). But being responsible means that if you can't take care of children, don't bring them into the world. It's not rocket science to protect yourself from pregnancies! You say you can't change your ways because you can't get a job and you don't want to see your children starve. Are they starving now? Are you providing for them now? Are you able to give them the guidance and comfort only a mother can provide them now? It's a great pity that you may have to go off to the Y, but if you go thinking that there's nothing that can help you, you will find no help. It's your attitude that makes the biggest difference. For the sake of your children, you must get the most out of this experience, which means preparing yourself to live life as a free person. Otherwise, you'll become just another absentee mother.

Caught Up

When I was first a teen, I was goin' through a lot of stuff I don't like, because when I was in Hayward I got caught up with these pimps, but I didn't know they was pimps.

(to be continued)

-Shaleema U5

From The Beat: Well, there's not much here to comment on. We're waiting for part two...

Dreams

Sometimes I have dreams when I go in the room.
Sometimes I have good dreams, sometimes I have bad dreams.
A good dream is my best dream about girls an' money an' my family.
Love

-Fat T U7

From The Beat: We also have dreams, Fat Thug. And one of our dreams is to see you living freely, without having to look over your shoulder. Could our dream come true?

I really don't think that CYA's "rehabilitation Services" will work for me.

Jail Is Cold

When I woke up in jail room, my legs are cold. A lot of stuff is cold. The world is a cold place.

-Jacky U3

From The Beat: Yes, the world can be a very cold place. But you can bring warmth to it through love, kindness and a decent respect for others.

Being A Snitch Is Cold

Being a snitch is cold. For example, when something bad happens and multiple people are involved. If everyone has to run from the police, usually not all of the people will get caught. The people who get away are usually happy and relaxed when they get home. Their minds are at ease. Then, without them knowing about it, one of the people who the police caught is telling on them, giving away the people who got away--names. Then the people are at home in bed, and the police knock on their door and they are in trouble, too. Snitches suck.

-Julian

From The Beat: We assume you are speaking from experience? The best way to handle this the next time is by not putting yourself in the position where you can get in trouble or to have police forcing you to say the things that shouldn't be said. Right? What's your plan?

A Little Something

As long as space endures
As long as humans exist
J may live too
To dispel the world of misery

-Skuddy

From the Beat: Who is J? If you were free, where would you start to make the world a better place? Hopefully working on bettering your own life!

This Poem

They say:
Roses are red
And baby violets are blue
And you the center of my heart
So I revolve around you
But I got a crush on you, girl
Ain't tryna rush you
I'm tryna do anything
Just to impress you
Now who possessed you
To think I was the wrong man?
The first time around
I was on you
Like a sun tan...
That's just a little piece

-James

From The Beat: We hope you send this to the lady you wrote it for, and next time write a piece that all of us Bet readers can embrace. Thanks

Just Thinking...

What's up with it, Beat? Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you all and to all of us people who are incarcerated. I was reading The Beat from last week and I am at the MCJH (Marin County Juvenile Hall) but I noticed that we have writers from all around the Bay Area and Arizona.

It's hella funny, because two summers ago I was at the juvenile hall in Durango. I hated it, but I was only there for one day and I got released. Also, I was born in the San Francisco/Marin area, but I lived in San Mateo County, Redwood City, for most of my life, so I got major love and respect for San Mateo County.

I got some peoples out there, but I have not been there in a minute. I used to go to Sequoia High School for freshman year. When I read the San Mateo writers, I look for people's names that I might know, but all of you got nicknames. You might know me, though. My name is Careina.

Li Lia, if you somehow see this, I miss you and love you with all my heart. Girl, I did not forget your seventeenth birthday on November 30th. Anyways, I have been here for ten days, and I found out that I'm finally getting sent to placement after a few years of probation and many times in the hall.

I'm 17 and I'm gonna be out. I hate that I have to go, but I'm sick of being in the system and on probation. I'm gonna be 18 next September. I feel like I have wasted so much of my adolescence on b-s, drugs, and alcohol.

The system is obviously not the life I was meant to lead, because each time I mess up, it brings me right back where I started. If I would have known that one decision I made to bring cocaine to school was going to cost me all of this, I would of thought twice before I got caught up. Since then, my life on probation has not been the same.

To everyone who is going through what I am, keep your head up, like Pac said, because this too shall pass. Peace...

-Careina

From The Beat: And we are very glad that you've gotten the point in realizing that this life isn't the life that was set for you to live. Just pay attention at your writing, most of all you talk about is being in many different places. If you continue to live like this, God knows where you might end up. In life, we all have to make mistakes in order to learn from them. Some learn the easy way and others the hard ways. You don't need to go through a remarkable experience in order to make a big change in your life. Is now or never. What do you say?

A Black Christmas

This year will be a black Christmas, mostly because I'm trapped in a room to rot away. Stuck with nowhere to go. No loved ones, just staff. Hopefully a pass will be given to me. Without a pass, it'll be a black Christmas. I'm depressed and nervous and my mom is stressing. Yup, it'll be a black Christmas.

-Joran

From the Beat: If you had the chance to go out and spend those days with your people, we hope you enjoyed it to the max. And if you didn't, we hope you work as hard as you can to spend the next holidays with family, free. Can you see that coming? What's your plan?

Things to Tell a Girl For Her Love

I'd climb the highest mountain if you were at the top.
You're my navigator on the sea of love.
I'd be lost without you.
Roses are red
Carnations are pink
I'd like to go out with you
What do you think?

-Eli

From The Beat: Can you write something like this about your life, 'cause in truth, and no disrespect, but this lovey dovey shhh is putting us to sleep.

The system is obviously not the life I was meant to lead, because each time I mess up, it brings me right back where I started.

You Can Make Your Own Door

Hey, Beat, Anthony here. This poem describes how I think I can get out of my problem:
In the end
Basically it's up to them
But that doesn't mean
I can't try to make my own key
What I'm trying to say is
If you give respect
You will receive it
And do what you need to do
And you can make your own door
With your own key
Thanks

-Anthony

From the Beat: You got it! You got the keys to any doors. Are you working in getting yours? How? How can we make that key? You're delivering the message, but incomplete.

Sentenced To Five

What it do, Mayne? This ya boy, Bud, from Vallejo, just droppin' some lines, feel me? Man, I got sentenced to a good five years and I'm 'bout to be on my way to the Y. It's nothin' to ya boy, though. Just 'bout to do that time and get it over wit'.

-James

From The Beat: Going to the CYA is nothin' to you? Please, you are talking about your life, your freedom. So how are you going to do your time? What's your plan to be something more than another statistic? Keep us posted.

SANTA CRUZ

Too Bad

I would like to get out for the holidays, but too bad.
I can't, because the judge doesn't like me.
Now I can't stay with my family because I'm in here.
I miss my family, and my girlfriend.

-Eddie

From The Beat: Eddie, remember how much you miss the people you love the next time you're tempted to repeat the behavior that got you into the hall. That should do the trick, if you miss them as much as you say.

The Big Maze

Hey Beat – well, I'm gonna write about my own topic. I'm gonna compare a maze to my life. My life is like a big maze. I started in the beginning. I thought I had it all figured out, that I knew my way out. But as soon as I got in trouble, I got lost. Now I'm sitting in one hall with nothing to do. I can't find my way out. I'm lost for the first time. I don't know what to do.

-Nancy

From The Beat: But you now know what not to do, so when you leave, this is one maze you won't have to revisit.

One Line On Santa

Santa has not really played a role in my life since I was six, and even then, he was not a big role in my life. Even when I was six, I still didn't believe it that much. My mom always did what she could, and I never asked for too much.

-Anonymous

From The Beat: You were half grown up at six, sounds like. And also respectful of your mom's financial limitations. Very interesting piece.

What If The World Was a Stage?

Well, if the world was a stage to me, I would consider myself playing the main character. Why? Because the whole scene would be about me, my life and future, where it begins and ends. If the world was a stage I could actually be stronger, wiser, and a successful person in life and choose whom I want to be. I think I could have been free.

You see if the word was a stage I could actually confess my dreams so that the world could get a good fill of what it brings, all the losses and paying the costs to the law, violating and trying to get away with my lil' baby on the way. Oh, how I have so much to say. I just can't get it in the way, 'cause I can't just stand to take the pain. I feel I'm the one to blame.

Man I feel so lame and yet so drained. Have you ever felt strained too much to maintain. That there's no more to entertain. And your life just feels trapped in because there's no more will within.

-Krystal

From The Beat: When we read a piece like this, Krystal, we can tell you for certain: you still have plenty of will within! You're strong! You know what you want to say. And you have a lifetime to say it — by talking, writing, and most important, showing through the way you live your life. You are not trapped as long as you can think. And girl, you can think!

Dreams

Man, my dreams are so real, sometimes they are like looking in the mirror. I usually dream about stuff I face on a daily basis. Only if y'all knew what I go through. Just imagine someone who is coldhearted to the very soul who reaches out for help. Why? 'Cause I once, too, was the one crying out, but got treated like shhh. From abandoned, building, outcast and the list goes on...

Most of y'all would tell me to get real and leave the B.S. alone, but y'all really don't know where I've been let alone where I come from. So until you spend a day in my shoes, keep follow your own advise and leave the B.S alone.

-Bam Bam

From The Beat: Even if people don't know your story, Bam Bam, they can still give useful advice. It's up to you to know what to take and what to discard. Most of the people who offer advice do so because they see the direction someone is moving in, and where that road leads, and they want to that person to think about a new path. If you automatically conclude that no one who hasn't been where you've been has anything to say to you, then you also have to conclude that you have nothing to say to anyone whose shoes you have not been in... We believe you do have things to share with those people that can be very important for them, just as we believe some of them have things to share with you that can be very important to your future.

That Hall

Juvenile hall has helped me naah way...When I went into the hall I stayed in that street mentality, get it? It's just a whole lotta cats from the streets getting caught with their crime.

What do we do when all of us are shoved in together? Shhh, make plans to do crimes again. All it has helped me wit' is fighting better, making money, more illegal and otha bad shhh. It just gave me a reputation and more associates.

-Crackhead

From The Beat: We understand exactly what you're talking about, Crackhead. So tell us how where you are is different — and how it has made you different.

Dreamin'

Sometimes when I have a dream it doesn't come true, but sometimes it do. I remember when I had this weird-ass dream that one day that I was going to get caught about something, and it really happened. It was something that was kind of different because I was told that dreams don't come true, but they do.

I just can't wait till 2007. Man, I'm 'bout to go dumb as soon as I get out of program I'm 'bout to get.... And I am going to go to college to get my beautician degree. I'm 'bout to save up on my own shop.

-Peaches & Cream

From The Beat: What does it mean to you when you write, "I'm 'bout to go dumb"? We don't like where going dumb leads, so please tell us this is just an expression for being happy that you're about to go to beauty college and start making it on your own...

VOICES IN SPANISH

Mis Consejos

Quiero hablar de mi vida. Con las drogas se gana dinero, pero te pierdes porque haces el mal a los demas y a ti mismo.

Lo mejor es estudiar, graduarse para nunca estar preso, no deberle nada a nadie, y comenzar una familia feliz a lado de tus padres.

Nunca camines en problemas que eso no deja nada bueno. Las pandillas te destruyen. En pandillas aprendes a robar, a fumar drogas, a matar y hacer muchas cosas malas.

From The Beat: Agradecemos mucho tus consejos y esperamos que ayuden a muchos a reflecionar en las cosas que estan haciendo y que no lo hagan. Parece que la vida te ha ensenado mucho y ahora estas contribuyendo de tus conocimiento. Sigue arriba y pensando positivamente, amigo. Gracias por tus palabras!

My Words of Advice

I want to talk about my life. With drugs, one makes money, but you lose yourself because you're doing something bad to others and to yourself, too.

The best thing to do is to study, graduate so you'll never find yourself behind bars, you won't owe anyone anything, and start a happy family at the side of your parents.

-Donadi U6

From The Beat: We deeply appreciate your words of advice and we hope that they help lots of other people reflect on the things that they are doing and to not do them. It appears like life has shown you a lot and now you are contributing to others this knowledge. Continue upwards and thinking positively, friend. Thank you for your words!

Mi Aburrida Vida

Mi vida es aburrida. No hay nada que hacer mas que caerle al bloque a fumar mota e ir en vez en cuando a la escuela. No hay nada importante que decir de mi vida.

From The Beat: Uno hace de su vida lo que uno quiere. Si tu acostumbras tu vida que sea aburrida y que solo se base a fumar mota, eso es lo que siempre sera. Deberi¬as de buscar otros tipos de cosas que hacer con tu tiempo libre. Mantente siempre en la escuela porque es muy importante.

My Boring Life

My life is boring. There's nothing else to do but go to the block to smoke weed and go every now and then to school. There's nothing important to say about my life.

-Juan B4

From The Beat: Life is what one makes of it. If you accustom your life to be boring and a life that is only based on smoking weed, that's what it will always be. You should try seeking other kinds of things to do with your free time. You should always maintain yourself in school because it's very important.

Voy A Correr La Proxima Vez

Para mi, la juvenile es una mala experiencia, pero a la vez estoy aprendiendo a valorar muchas cosas que teni¬a afuera y que no tengo aqui adentro. Una cosa importante que me ha ensenado al estar aqui es que para la otra vez que yo haga algo, voy a correr para que los policias me persigan y hagan su trabajo. Creo que es igual si dejas que te arresten y no haces nada a que si corres. Por eso para la otra vez prefiero hacerlos batallar para que sufran. Si yo pienso esto es porque cuando yo termine de hacer lo que hice para estar aqui, no corri y los policias me arrestaron facil y tengo los mismos cargos como si hubiera puesto resistencia. Es todo lo que les digo.

From The Beat: Esta experiencia te deberia de servir para no volver a hacer cosas que te quiten la libertad, pero en cambio, estas pensando en otra cosa que mas bien te perjudicara mas. Te aconsejamos que ni siquieras intentes lo que estas pensando hacer. Han habido veces que los policias han golpiado fuertemente a los jovenes. No dejes que eso te pase a ti. Te decimos esto por experiencia. Deberi¬as de estar pensando en como ser las cosas mas positivas y evitar caer al mismo lugar donde te encuentras. Usa la cabeza!

Next Time, I'm Going To Run

For me, Juvenile Hall is a bad experience, but at the same time, I am learning to value many things that I had on the outs, and that I don't have inside of here. One important thing that being in here has taught me is that next time I do something, I am going to run so the police chase me and do their job. I believe that it is the same thing whether you let them arrest you and don't do anything or if you run. That's why next time, I prefer making them battle so they can suffer. If I think this, it's because when I finished doing what I was doing that brought me to this place, I didn't run and the police easily apprehended me and I have the same kind of charges I would have gotten if I had put up a resistance. This is all I have to say to y'all.

-Jesus, Santa Cruz

From The Beat: This experience should serve some kind of purpose in your life like to teach you not to do things that take your freedom from you, but on the other hand, you're thinking about another thing that would get you in even more trouble. We advice you to not even try what you are thinking about doing. There have been times when the police have used strong force against juveniles. Don't let this happen to you. We're telling you this from experience. You should be thinking about how you can do more positive things and avoid ending up in the same place where you find yourself right now. Use your head!

EDITOR'S NOTE CONTEST

From The Beat: These are our last four submissions to the 16th editorial note writing contest — a letter to the president. Maybe we should do more promotional work regarding the contest or maybe more of our readers need to take a glance at the editor's note. Whatever the case we only got six total submissions to this contest, which we think is our best one topic wise in a long time, but anyhow we would love to get more buy-in for future contest pieces. Especially being that we're offering a hundred dollars to our first place winner, fifty dollars to our second place winner, and twenty five dollars to our third and fourth place winners. There's not much to choose from this quarter so the competition should be easy. Take a peek at these next submissions, for they feature some of our favorite writers. Again, these are our last submissions so we will begin the voting process here shortly...

"A Letter to the President"

Mr. President, our children in the inner-city of our urban society are being slaughtered by our deliberate turn of the head and being swept into the American closet of silence.

RICKY PAUGH

San Diego County Jail

Dear Mr. President

Our country would not be a safer place, without the war against terrorism.

It's an unexpressible wonderful feeling to be able to get in a car drive at anytime, anywhere you want on this land, and that goes for anything and everything else when exercising freedom.

But Mr. President, what I really want to ask... is, can you bring our soldiers home now?

Thank you,

WILLIAM GRAJEDA

San Quentin State Prison

Dear Mr. President Of The United Stated Of America, George W. Bush:

Mr. President George W. Bush of the United States of America, this is a notice of concern, petition and complaint regarding the inner-city populations of America that are afflicted by poverty, hunger and despair. Mr. President, you have already shown your feeling in regards to the impoverished and down-trodden classes of America, as you demonstrated in your distance from the catastrophes of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath which largely affected an impoverished section of Louisiana.

However, Mr. President, I am here to inform you that this epidemic of inner-city deterioration of poor and broken home families is a growing epidemic in our American society that cannot be kept shut inside the darkness of a your White House closet for long, Mr. President. Soon it will begin to reach across those lines of urban and suburban classes and climb even higher, just like the early unknown cancer plagues of our early American society.

Mr. President, already the state of California has more broken home families, children living in poverty and parents incarcerated then the population of most third world countries. Mr. President, we have generations of American youth dying in the streets across America from New York to California every second of the hour.

Already the state of California has over 200,000 thousand people incarcerated in penal systems, that's more people in prison then France, Germany and Nigeria had combined all together! And can you imagine how many of our American children are directly affected by this fact and then multiply that statistic across American urban cities, where our impoverished youth are being innocently infected by this horrible epidemic we are ignoring! Mr. President, our inner-city American children are being raped, murdered and tortured by the impoverished conditions and our blatant disregard of our American civil responsibilities to our citizens as a whole society, a society I should remind you, that is considered (majority of) a Christian community.

Mr. President, and yet our answer to the improvised conditions of our inner-city America, where may I remind you, that our youth are being abused, starved, and devastated by the shocks of sudden broken homes as there mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, siblings and generations are being murdered, raped or robbed before their innocent eyes or carted away to the cages of some newly built prison house; is only to build more juvenile detention centers, youth correctional facilities and then later more prison warehouses, as the next generation from our inner city America increases in population and helps usher in the next quarter century. Mr. President, surely we must not stand by idle!

Mr. President, there is a young girl of twelve years old, walking down Sunset Blvd in Los Angeles, this very moment selling her body for a place to sleep.... There is a nine year old boy on International Blvd. in East Oakland California selling baggies of pills or crack so he can eat tonight and share with his hungry brothers and sisters...

Mr. President, there is a mother pregnant inside Chowchilla Valley State Prison doing three years for stealing pampers from K-mart for her two year old son, what happens to her new born? What happens to her? There is a father in Folsom State Prison serving a life term 'cause he needed another shot of heroin.... There is a ten year old son in juvenile hall, there is a sixteen year old daughter in CYA (California Youth Authority) there is a grandma and grandpa on their knees praying for help.... There is more... all of them lost voices crying from the attic/darkness of their American home.

Mr. President, our inner-city Americans are dying, and nobody is listening with their hearts! Mr. President, our children in the inner-city of our urban society are being slaughtered by our deliberate turn of the head and being swept into the American closet of silence.

Mr. President, our inner-city children of America are dying to be heard and there last refuge for many of them to be heard are clinging onto the ledges of The Beat Within pages that reveal the epidemic which continues to murder our inner-city children. Mr. President, The Beat Within, is a non-profit organization for the inner-city youth and juvenile that reach from as far as LA, San Francisco, across Texas, Louisiana to New York, giving a voice exclusively to the impoverished and broken home juvenile and inner-city youth that are the constant victims of murder, rape, child abuse, and poverties of many kind.

Mr. President, are home-base is San Francisco California, where it began and continues to grow as we struggle to help our inner-city American youth to express the despair of our abandonment in their desperate time of need, Mr. President. All though we constantly struggle to keep this non-profit organization above the financial waters Mr. President, over goal and commitment remains steadfast and unwavering. And that goal is to help bring hope back into our inner-city American/ communities, to help restore that hope which our American children in the inner-city are being robbed of daily by the constant despairs of poverty, broken homes and families scattered apart and sent off to prison institutions or graveyards, only to leave their children left to the cold unforgiving streets of the inner-city America.

Mr. President, this Beat Within publication is just a brief glimpse of the voices you will find in the dregs of our inner-city American communities-voices and pleas that will become the last words for many of them, voices that have a place in our Beat Within publication before they disappear forever into the darkness of that White House closet...

Please do not be silent Mr. President, hear our voice, help your inner-city America Mr. President.

LEE SAMUEL CAPERS

Death Row, San Quentin

Mr. President:

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Mr. L.S. Capers. Currently I am now incarcerated here on Death Row, in California State Prison at San Quentin. I deeply regret not being able to speak with you face to face. Sad to say, it's a question of whether you would take the time to hear a citizen of this country, which is in your control, out or not. My circumstances won't allow any other way than this letter.

Sir, if I may call you that, has it ever crossed your mind about what those in the lower economical communities are now struggling for? Is it so hard for you to take time to sit and hear the cries of the banished children of Eve? Those who do nothing but fight the conflicting currents that life uses against them as a mechanism of struggle that in all totality, wrings the very breath of life, which those of "The Struggle" cherish with all their inner beings? Do you have any regard for humanity, sir?

Tell me, do you know what it's like to have to go and rob and kill the next man just so your family can have a roof overhead and food on the table? How about going damn near out of your mind while your two-month-old baby sister cries with hunger, while mama is all strung out on heroin and too busy on the nod to give a fraction of a shhh to whether her babies are taken care of? Huh? Tell me Mr. Silverspoon? Do you know what it's like?

If I may, let me ask you this: do you know what it's like to fear for your life every time you step out of your house, on a bright and pretty Sunday morning? To feel the oppression weighing down on ya shoulders, wondering if an AK47 or AR15 await you in the parked car down the block? Has fear ever met you on the barrel side of a gun? Living in a barrio so poverty stricken, that your only solution is to throw the people who have been there for years in prison for life or hitting them with an INS hold? Where violence is a live wire and death does its sick dance of celebration? When the gun smoke clears, and instead of a gang member, what he sees is a five-year-old child? Do you know?

With all the issues that reside in the cities of this grand and noble country today, "your" country by the way, sir, how can you just turn the other cheek as if none of this is happening?

What goes through your mind when you hear about the atrocities of ghetto life? Are we scum? Animals? Wetbacks, niggers, Japs, and poor white trash? Is it a money thing? Is that it? Or is it because we as 'hood bred and government fed, have no place set aside for us within this so-called American Dream?

You're sending all of our troops out to fight a war that pretty much had nothing to do with us until terrorists started doing their dirty deeds because, in my eyes, "Somebody" pissed them off! Me being only 32 years old, who am I to say who started what? All I do know is, sir, there's a major war going on right under your nose but it seems like you don't even care! It's not an issue of whether or not we live or die. No! That's not your concern at all!

Years ago, I lost my wife and future child. The reason is highlighted and obvious. Some knuckleheads who had nothing else better to do, decided to let off on me and her. The reason? There isn't any jobs out there, sir! You are allowing all Congress to dictate how to run a country that should be under your full control! Welfare has been cut down to next to nothing. SSI and disability the same. So because of the cuts on income, lack of jobs, etc., these gangsters only knew one way. They did have a choice, mind you, but yet they felt that nobody cared and neither would it matter if they changed their lives or not. The key word here is "discouraged" at what life has dealt them as a hand.

Many today, sir, such as myself, are discouraged about many things. Some act emotionally in good ways or bad ways, and others don't know how to deal with it. In this, they resolve their problems through violence, drugs, sex, and whatever else their destructive minds can come up with. This is true fact. This I know from experience. It's a mind of a gangster.

Back in the days, the roads were paved as the destruction in the lives of humanity as a whole, was utterly tainted and taken a back by the war that took place in Vietnam. Many who suffered this all-out tragic circumstance, still suffer from its after-effects. I'm no professor on history, but sadly I do see the after-effects of the madness.

To this very day, you send troops out to the Middle East to fight a war that has been over for quite some time. Still people keep dying and mothers are still crying. Why has world politics been the angel of death to so many folks for so many years?

I've been told that because I am a convicted and condemned prisoner, I have no say in regards to voting and being a United States citizen. Fine, if that's the call, so be it. Just keep in mind, all the men, women, and young ones' blood is coloring the White House red. By you turning the other cheek on issues that truly do matter, the precious blood of the citizens, of this beautiful country, has tainted and will continue to taint the innocence of all that the U.S.A stands for.

The colors of this country's flag, is Red, White, and Blue. It's supposed to represent the colors of life, sir. But instead it has become colors of death. The red is the blood of the people, the white is those of you who reside there in the White House, and the blue stands for the sadness in our mothers' hearts. There has to be a change! We can't go on this way! For this reason, I am sending this letter to you. Please, Mr. President, help our people! Give them a chance to beat and win the fight known as the struggle!

With much respects...

ISRAEL PEREZ

Salinas Valley State Prison

Throwing Rocks At The Moon

I fully comprehend that the odds of my letter even sitting upon the oval Office's desk is virtually an improbability. In fact, I do suspect I'd have a better chance at surviving were I to foolishly take a firm hold of the electrified fence which surrounds the maximum security prison I'm currently incarcerated at. So, I guess hose odds are about as promising as your Administration's original plan to secure a victory in Iraq. And since such foolishness didn't prevent you from making an ill-advised endeavor into Iraq, then why shouldn't I make my own attempt at hitting the moon with a rock? And, if the worst of my labor's fruits is only that my words are but a miniscule footnote in the legacy of your failed presidency, then at the very least my tiny voice will have been recorded into the vast backdrop of our nation's history.

Yet, just on the off chance that by some miraculous miracle, the pages of this letter flutter into some parallel universe and they do actually find their way into your hands... Well, I'd like to leave some thoughts, questions, and accusations at your bullet-protected feet (I'm sure a couple Secret Service agents didn't appreciate that last remark.)

Well, as I sit here in one of California's most infamously violent maximum security prisons (Salinas Valley State Prison), I am surrounded by drug abuse victims, drug dealers, armed robbers, sex offenders, life takers, and sure enough, the always present handful of wrongfully convicted men. Nevertheless, throughout my many years behind these rarely forgiving prison walls, I've yet to come upon a prisoner who has left in his wake more broken homes, shattered lives and — worst of all — putrefying graves that you have, Mr. President.

And it's that latter fact which amazes me most. After all, for the last few years I've been able to watch you on television as you've traveled our nation (the civilized world for that matter) embracing and shaking the hands of fellow human beings. Human beings who would ironically cringe in fear from the many murderers who surround me now. All the while there you stand, posturing smugly in your expensive tailor made suit, responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of lives. And, with so many thousands now dead (and dying), I wonder if you ever truly contemplate the magnitude of such loss. When, at long last, you are all alone with your quiet thoughts, when your many advisors have retired for the evening, when the cameras have grown cold, when even Mrs. Bush and Barney peacefully slumber trouble-free, do you then permit yourself to think about the murderous war beast you helped to unleash? When night has sat long on the White House, and all its many rooms have fallen silent, can you make out the distinct sound of the war beast stalking through the streets of Baghdad? Or, is its bone crushing tread drowned out by that constant nagging voice... you know, that voice that keeps telling you that you've been used by the men of America's darkest shadows. Men who handpicked you to be the front for their master plans?

I guess there's always the possibility you're more lost than ever. I believe you to be. That instead of knowing the thoughts and emotions a truly good leader would experience, you find yourself concerned only with your golf swing, or how the "Barney Cam" will turn out. Yet, even if you honestly grasp and regret the murderous path you helped set much of the world on, there will come a day of spiritual reckoning, a day when every quiet moment will be replaced by the screams of ten thousand tortured deaths, when every five hundred-dollar-a-plate meal will taste of blue bottle larva, fat from their own ghastly meal. Each sit of fine brandy will have a hint of the ocean of blood you helped to spill. And every cigar will let off the stench of singed Iraqi hair.

And then, when you at last discover yourself immobile in your death bed, when the cold grasp of mortality is sought after more than life itself, only then will you take your rightful place in a Dante-like inferno, surrounded by other men who were cut from the same war mongering cloth.

Sincerely,

A Citizen of The United States of America

ALEX SHELTON ***If you're into great story telling and even greater poetry, you'll really be into this great writer. He's always dropping amazing pieces on us and this week is no different. He starts us off with a very good short story about his older sister babysitting. The whole situation is a disaster waiting to happen but in the end, there's a moral to the story. And that's if given a second chance, the potential for change is limitless. In his second piece, a poem titled 'Prison Gang Diary — A Dropout's Blueprint,' he courageously lists reasons why gangs are not the code anymore — at least for him. And as he gives his perspective you can't help but respect it, whether you're still gang-banging or not, because it is his own opinion. He's writing from Kern Valley State Prison in Delano, CA. We've always enjoyed his views and the wonderful way he expresses them.***

When Am I Coming Home

My mom left to work at the cannery, trusting my sis to baby sit. I was trying to rest my young neck for school the next day, I heard the music blasting in the background of the Jackson Five "ABC." My record — I was a very bratty kid but with very good grades. I was marching into the living room mad to tell her to keep the noise down, when I seen two of her friends. I "totally forgot" the being mad and all, I mean one of these friends would mess up my hair with her hand and say "oh he's so cute" "he's going to be such a heart breaker" I would get real embarrassed but I loved it when they hugged me or kissed me – no complaints there, so my sis invited more friends over from the neighborhood – bringing beer and I'm laying down on the couch with my head laying on Lisa's leg with a "smile."

Next thing I remember I woke up to people running around and I'm like what the hell is this, I thought there was a fire or something. I went to check on my young sis, she was 5 and I was 8 1/2. I seen her asleep so I walked out of the room. I came face to face with a policeman, boy was I scared, he told me I was coming with him and my baby sis, we were placed in the cop car, and we pulled-up at a children's shelter. This lady asked me where my mom was, I said at work at Van De Kamp – so finally they located her but we were on hold, 'cause my sister took off running down the block when the cops showed up! I was told to put on pajamas and led to a room with some lady, it was a dorm setting with like 20 beds. We walked to a cafeteria for breakfast, and I wanted to see my baby sis bad.

So this lady about sixty or seventy came to the activity room and called me aside. She said she was the grandmother of this place! She asked a lot of questions, I didn't mind answering 'cause I was given a cold soda and a Twinkie but I really was kinda lost, confused. I was young and now I wanted to see moms, so three days later my mom came with my favorite aunt. They brought McDonalds and I thought I was leaving with them when visiting hours were over. Boy, was I wrong. My sis got all hysterical and crying, which got my eyes leaking, which got all of everyone's eyes leaking, even the grandmother of Children's Society! She eventually calmed me down saying she would play dominoes with me or talk. I had no choice but to get adjusted to this place — my dad was in a California state prison at Soledad, couldn't see him so that made it harder!

Every time my mom came I would ask "When am I coming home? How's my dog doing? My cat? My fish, which died over the four months away at this shelter my mom finally got us out after numerous court hearings. None of this was her fault, she was a hardworking woman, she didn't deserve the courts saying she was a unfit mother. My sister was placed in juvenile hall for all this and for running away, but my grandma and grandpa went to court to get her out so she was released a month later.

She came to the house when I was watching the cartoons on T.V. She cried so hard on my shoulder that I really felt sorry for her. She was to live with our grandparents for 60 days. When she came back to live with us she wasn't the same. She was nicer, we didn't fight no more — and my mom went to work with no worries. She was a good babysitter. I forgave her like she asked me too! I still made sure that Lisa still got to come to the house. She was my dream girl.

In life everyone makes mistakes, no one is perfect. My sis today has accomplished a lot, even since this episode, she has graduated, worked driving school buses, and has a devoted husband w/ three kids, doesn't drink, or do drugs, and has over the years told me to change this life I'm living. Which I did, "I know when I'm going home!"

A Dropout's Blueprint

Ain't nothing changed but my status quo
Allow this poem to roll!
In these experienced hands I've held the gang's bonds,
Constitution, and format schooling and disciplining
The young and eager
He wanted to be a high-leaguer
In cell "recruitment-process," the stronghold "secretive" phase
Like going though a maze
The "Code Of Silence" was just a phrase
The household "policy" applied to the cell block within
You had to be sharp like a shark with a defensive fin!
Tricky Full (sixty)
I won't sit in my cell and make no threat to the gangs fleet
I ain't no "cell soldier" the "training" received is still discreet
This ex-homie "yeah" you know me
Try me!
From one end of California to the other there are so many "dropouts" And counting that the "active membership list" is mighty small
People in the game you call
"Brothers" were often crossed-up
Because of ones jealousy,
So I'm glad that nothing has been reevaluated
So keep on destroying your own fall!
So quit lying to the first termers on their way to prison
The percentage of Canteen placed in a store for new arrivals is a joke and a lie
It's like paying "rent" to a "bro" by a (non-"bro") so take that sty out of your eye
I know the who, what, where and why!
And all the "meetings" taking place in the ring
Don't be "surprised"
When you see your own homeboy sitting on a stool ready to sing!
All I've seen, its way out, you want to hand pick a so-called worthy "Bro" to run things holding the keys
With a big head on his shoulders 'cause he's a "SQUAD-LEADER" (SL)
Or (OA) "over-all" PLLEEEASE!
Always writing two and three hundred word essays 'cause he's always in "violation" and at stake
Slipping and sliding like a snake! Code of Conduct?
He acted like a straight immature kid trying to instruct!
I've seen so many homeboys panic and stress
I never did second guess
Miss me with "who's the best" transporting "hot" coded messages from one prison warehouse to another
In case of "emergency" eat the kite and "destroy" its contents, but something is always going wrong that's why I.G.I the institutional gang investigator knows "everything" about all gangs structure!
Survival tactics, diversion tactics, weaponry skills,
Numerous other skills at hand, slashing instruments, plastic knives that will kill
Spears to penetrate the flesh, crossbows, a blow dart
Made from the gang chart!
This here "dropout" has much knowledge
I share this with the youngsters in juvenile hall, and C.Y.A.
Some work their way up to a "big homies" display
A signature style of murder at bay!
Engaging in murderous "hits" for profit
With this high-ranking organization on the street
With gangsters holding status
1st in command, 2nd in command, RSD-regional security dept and ultimately a (RM) ruling council all established regiments
Bringing in money to the gangs "bank" by means of selling drugs, burglaries, on anything to build-up this viscous gang settlements
There's no statute of limitations on a "187" murder
You may find yourself writing a writ of habeas-corpus
In a cell trying to get a life term dropped-down, with gang enhancements it's a negative border
Mandatory yard, calling out a "Cadence" inside/outside count
Machine consisting of a 5 on 5 calisthenics mount!
Security "posted-up" at the gate
Lying in wait!
If you can't keep up with the machine you'll find yourself running in place
In the far corner so hope you have a lot of wind and energy
You "have to" stay up all-day mattress rolled-back
Shoes on, lights on, suited and booted, you didn't want to go to school on the street or join the U.S. military
So hear this prison commentary!
These organized gangsters are melting away and the authorities
Are breaking the backs, many are abandoning the homeboys force
Without remorse!

Undefeated Laughter

When I was in jail
Many people laughed
As if it was impossible
For me to take the lords path...
But I didn't let their mockery
Be an obstacle
Because I know with God
All things are possible
So I kept reading my bible
Without a shadow of a doubt
And I'm still walking with Christ
Now that I'm out...
You see it's because
I confessed to being a sinner
That in Christ Jesus
I am now a winner
Now I am drug free
And also have a job
Because my belief
Is not a facade ...
I can do all things through Christ
Who strengthens me
And it was while I was still in jail
That I became free...
So laughter at that time
Was what God saw I needed
Because laughter is medicine
For the undefeated
Even though they laughed
To be cold
Laughter is the best medicine
For any soul
Psalm 40:1 waited patiently for the lord and he heard my cry
And he inclined unto me and heard my cry

After all being free is a hundred times better
Than being confined
Unless being in jail
Is something you don't mind

Eventually

My life
I had basically ruined
I'd get out of jail
Eventually to be back soon
I'd get out
And take that first hit
Then eventually
I'm daily doing it
I'd shop lift
With this thought
Eventually
I would get caught
Because that eventually
Always came
After all the result
Would always be the same
The same as
If I get out and do it again
Eventually
I'll be right back in
But eventually
I came to see
This eventually
Is not how I want to be
So eventually
I came up with a plan
I decided to let God's love
Hold my hand
This is a poem of reality
Think about what would happen eventually

RHONDA JONES

Our greatest spiritual poet is back on the scene after being MIA for a couple of issues. Rhonda has always been a very loyal and dedicated Beat Without writer, so we're sure you know her by now. Well, she was locked up in Connecticut for a minute but now she's out and holding true to her word to stay free doing the 'good' work. She never hesitates to keep us posted with what's going on with her and her pursuit to find herself through God. She truly has been an inspiration to us all and we can't thank her enough for all she's done. We often get pieces from other writers giving shot outs to the rest of us and on each and everyone's list, you'll find Rhonda Jones. It's for good reason as she always gives us something to think about and we know she's keeping us all in her prayers. We're grateful to have been able to get to know you through paper and pen. Hopefully, she'll keep us updated further along down the line...

Probation Vs. Time

There are people who say they'd rather
Do their time than be on probation
But how could not having your freedom
Not be better than incarceration?
After all being free is a hundred times better
Than being confined
Unless being in jail
Is something you don't mind
So what on probation
Your freedom is curtailed
It's still a thousand times better
Than being in jail...
Because it's all about choices
And the choices that you choose
That will determine
Whether you'll win or lose
Ultimately it's up to you
To decide
That's if you have the opinion
To be on the outside
Because being on probation
Is not so bad as it may seem
Unless you like living
Under such extremes
Being told when to eat
And when to go to bed
when you could be out
Living free instead...
So please give your life
A chance an use probation to your advantage
The constructiveness may even teach you how to manage

How Many Times

How many times
Have you thought about?
What you want to do
When you got out?
Each and every day
When you awake?
You say you're not going to
Make the same mistakes...
So you write this
In your letters;
And swear that you're going to
This time do better.
Because now you are
Saying this again;
Trying to make sense of
How this happened...
So when you get out
And do the same;
It's your claim
That you must blame...
Because let the truth
Be told;
Even your thoughts
Are getting old...
So if you get out
And once again get caught
How many times will you
Go over these thoughts.

SMILEY ***This next writer drops four knock out poems on us this week. He maps out the relationship he has with his son by dialoguing there ups and downs. It's been mostly downs as the father is obviously incarcerated and the son is following in his father's footsteps. And not as an act of emulating his father, but as an act for the hate he has for his father for being absent this whole time. These four poems bring to life the struggle we go through when we have children before we're fully ready to be responsible for them. And although the father seems to have changed his ways and wants to be a part of his son's life, you can't blame the child for being skeptical. It seems as though the child has his own struggles to overcome, but hopefully he'll eventually accept his father back into his life so they can triumph over these obstacles together. Only time will tell what happens next... The father's writing from N.A. Chaderjian, one of several California Youth Authority institutions in Stockton, CA.***

For You, Son (Written As Father)

Sorry son that I have been gone for so long
I didn't know any other way to explain it so I wrote this song
See, listen I know I've lived a
Corrupted life for a long time
Living my life by a different set
Of rules but none of them mine
I was loving the street game
All wrapped up in the gang
To me it was all the same
If you know what I'm saying
I was down for my hood
And even for them others
When I should have been there
For my true family instead
My priorities were twisted like a
Twister blind to the fact
I married Lizz then emotionally and
Mentally stabbed her in the back
Been living a lie I didn't really
Know what true love was
I was high on everything but
Life searching to get a buzz
I'm sorry that I left you alone
But now daddy is ready to come home.

I'm sorry that I left you alone
But now daddy is ready to come home.

Hit You Back (Written As Pops)

Would you really try to kill
Me for not being there for you
I know that I made hella promises
But this time my word is true
You had or have hella hate for me
Banging, slanging, doing my thang
But if you look at yourself you're
Not that much different almost the same
I had problems with my siblings
Basically my whole family as you do too
I ain't gonna lie it's even hard to stay
Faithful to any... the same with you
And I was never there so I can't be
Your teacher so you ain't a student
I only encouraged you to do anything
That you thought you couldn't
And yeah I'm truly sorry for leaving
You and your mom with nothing
But to be honest I don't think I
Could have made you into something
I thought you all were better on your own
Just had to keep the cops away
That was even hard cause I was consistently
On the run all day everyday
So can you please learn to forgive
Now that I stop living in sin

Right Back At You (Written As Son)

Stop right there that is the first mistake you made
You're welcome like bugs are to a can of Raid
I learned a lot of bad habits
I'm basically an unholy creature
But you do what you're taught
I'm the student you're my teacher
You never been there for me
Basically you didn't even care
A thug growing up with twice
The problems in life ain't fair
I roamed to the streets to
Earn my name and my game
Didn't refuse to do anything didn't
Want me and you to be the same
I was in my own league cause
I had my own corrupted secret world
I was falling apart while trying
to find love with hella girls
it went from one to three if
I was lucky four at a time
Just letting you know I didn't care
For you...listen to these rhymes
I'm sorry you're blind to the fact,
We can never be cool like that.

For My Pops (Written As Son)

I have something to tell you pops and you
May not want to hear it but it needs to be said

When I was younger I secretly used
To hate you when I was a little kid
I was a solo, a lone star
On everything that I did
Growing up I used to plan out
Ways that I could get back at you
Thought and even dreamed out every
Detail that would hopefully come true
You left me alone feeling hella lonely
Hoping your worst nightmare was only me
You used to act like you truly loved
Me when you knew you could care less
The anger that was burning inside
Me made me hate the West.
What raised me was the north and east
The sides that created this beast
As I was getting older
My heart was getting colder
Packing on the pounds G,
For when you came around me
Now that I look back I
See that I had a messed past
I don't care cause now
I'm living my life full blast
Or you can say full throttle
Taking a sip from the bottle
Hoping I get to see tomorrow
Even if it is filled with sorrow
When the day came when we'd fight
I hoped I'd put you in the casket
Even if I had a slug already named
I'd still pull the trigger and blast it
I always wait to see your facial
Expression at the tip of my heat
Wondering if you would beg on your
Knees or stand on your feet
Either way I'd still have to put you in a body bag
Send you to the morgue so your body gets toe tagged
The only problem was grandmomma
She would take the news bad
Every time she would see me she would
Ask why I had killed my own dad
Then I'd have to explain about how
It is to grow up without him
At least show me the way of the
Game instead of my life of sin

I Always Wanted To "Catch Up"

When I was a little boy
Brother Lawrence was already eleven
I knew I could never catch up
Until we both get to heaven

Brother Lawrence was ninety-nine to a day
I still stay eleven years, his younger
Will I ever catch up and stay
Lawrence's little brother

I'll be heading to Heaven sometime soon
Lawrence wants for me there
I'll be flying past that moon
Lawrence and I make a great pair

We'll be angels together
I'll still look up to him
And if that devil gets one of us
The other will join his brother.

The Field Mouse

The little mouse
Stays in his house
Deep in the ground
Let the hawk eat grouse

Disaster

The young sea gull
Has a fall
He called for help
As he let out a yelp
He was not hurt at all
Each day I walk
But, I seldom talk
I just go my mile
And then I smile
And watch the flying hawk

The Native American

This was our land
Now you call it your land
You call us savage
And you steal our land
You destroyed our trees
Brought nature to her knees
Did just as you please
Now our air makes us sneeze

HANS JENSON **We just got several poems from New Lisbon Prison in New Lisbon, Wisconsin. This man touches on everything from politics with pieces like 'Prisons Vs. Schools' and 'The Native American' to more spiritual things in poems like 'We Ask, What's Next?' and 'I Always Wanted To Catch Up.' There's no doubt in our minds that this next writer is versatile in his subject matter and we really enjoy that. It spices up our pages. So read on and let us know if you're feeling him the way we are — tremendously. Thank you for all your writing, we look forward to hearing from you again soon.**

Mars is within our grasp
Soon we will send people there
Travel by shuttle at last
Now, we can travel anywhere

Prisons Vs. Schools

Should we build more prisons
Or should we build more schools
Which is better equipped
And has the proper tools

Shall we educate our people and build schools
Where we can teach
By the golden rule

Or shall we slam shut the prison door
In the face of the crook
Let him rot in hell
And never see a book

You can't build men
In a prison environment
What they do learn in the can
Is from others who, to prison are sent

A smile or a frown, which shall we keep around
Get rid of all prisons
A better way must be found

We Ask, "What Next?"

We have been to the depths of the ocean
Mankind continues to explore
Of a trip to the moon, we are boasting
Always, we are asking for more

Mars is within our grasp
Soon we will send people there
Travel by shuttle at last
Now, we can travel anywhere

Unreachable throughout our past
Heaven is there, somewhere
Yes, yes, at last
We are going there

Should we build more prisons
Or should we build more schools
Which is better equipped
And has the proper tools

The Goose Is Flying

The geese fly by
Some low some high
The hawk does say
As they fly away
It's time to say "good bye"

WILLIAM HAMBY

Wow... Yeah that's all we can say for William Hamby... wow. He's a lyrical mastermind on a mission to get his point across. He can go with the same rhyme scheme for lines and lines on end. He can also call people on their contradictions with the best of them. We always knew this man had talent, but this week he shows us a side of him we've never seen before. It encompasses passion, lyrical intelligence, and an all out expression we're sure everyone will be able to feel. He's writing from Pleasant Valley State Prison in Coalinga, CA... You'll enjoy his work as much as we have, for he gives you no choice... We'll leave you with one of our favorite quotes from his poem, "Still Posted." "Nightmares of swat teams, searching for me, straight modern slavery, save me, I'm grown but I'm still my moma's baby."

Untitled

How can a coward ride when he only breathes lies
Feel the heat from the wise your heat dies when I rise,
As we meet defeat then we die, but I'm deep as the sky
I see you weep why you cry?
Put a smile on like the Lays commercial
and if you ride and then die death can't hurt you
Stay faithful and seek eternal

As Is

These vocals, I hold true, emotional roller coaster,
Close like I hold you, feel these I spoke,
Though I don't know you,
People say I'm a lone fool, 36 growing old too,
But we all decay this is so true, and not new,
Is this gift that I give you,
Don't let the spirit miss you,
This goes out to whoever you send to, or who sent you,
I intend to live as righteous men do,
But I'm in hell where the devil,
Put rebels, only few like me on this level.
There's no telling how well I'd be dwelling,
Hard to breathe when I fell in,
Can't believe the dreams they selling,
The schemes they yelling,
I block it with divine silence,
Sharp as rocket science, this mind evades violence,
Time still flying as the world keeps dying,
So many hurt that's trying,
Still I smile though I feel like crying,
Settling for less than,
Lost in a struggle stressing,
Help me, us, help them
'cause we cursed beyond blessing.

Somebody Feel Me

I'm sitting wondering when can I breathe
Open the door so I can leave all I perceive
This concrete oceanous seam many believe
I got plots up my sleeve please
They couldn't feel what I be
Jesus and Pharaoh in me, contradiction?
No, just prophetic prediction
Your fiction got the world in a prison
I speak in behalf of the wise
Uncivilized scream cries, no one believe they lies
Search my soul and they hurt me some mo'
This ghost is a fire that glows
It seems this world's the only one you know
A planet damned, imprisoned, innocent many
But thank you, can I say it again?
Because if I had niceness
I wouldn't write this, no lifer but a 6 striker
I'm hard like bricks with carbine rifles
Except I'm smashing idols
While you all sit idle
Meet the eternal, here to learn you
Teach you beseech you
Like midnight creep through
Mr. "Hambino" greet you
Full blown ex-ranger chromosome
Still I spark the darkness like chrome
Through papers my heart done been shown
This excursion should take us all home
Whites, Blacks and Homes
Face it, should we live life in a terror dome
And struggle in this, the beaches are bliss
Here me preach give a kiss
Exquisiteness people ain't feeling this
But it's nice to know you hear my gift
Feel my spit not from the lips
From the gift of my shhh
Next thought:
Lack of integrity, stresses me
As for me thank God for blessing me
For testing me now I can seek the best for me
While the rest just sleep
Rest in the piece of deceit
I'm here to complete
What I was destined to keep
You be you and me be true
Whatever you do
Each of y'all and you God bless you

Still Here

Okay, you got me, I'm in hell still rotting
See through your plots plotting
Alright let me install this topic
Only the wrath of God gone stop it
Insecure evil entity of justice want me in a coffin
Devious they wise through, want me to die slow
But I'm injected like nitro tell me how yo'
So called gangsters and bangers
Turn coward when facing arraignments
Praying to God but turning to Satan
Danger got they heart racing, erase 'em
I seen gangsters shine shoes in the jail basement
Why they need affection? Men for protection?
I send this out to all sections, factions, defections,
First you ball now you stressing, a twisted lesson
Unsure, unaware, and second guessing.
Won't listen to this royal impression
In your mind you toil with suggestions, you need Gods blessing
Why you scared to be alone?
Afraid to seek the eternal God's throne
Left in a zone, where you feel oh so wrong
You not bad, would you want bad the worst to have
Your mom or dad not happy just sad
Don't you know Satan wants us zipped in a bag
Only love God never bow to a flag
They say "in justice, trust us"
But how can I trust when my head's been busted
Wide open, like my heart that's broken
Fight back the tears I'm choking, struggling, coping
And with these years picture me joking, or juggling
Nah we serious, the pain is too near to us,
Hope the Lord hearing us.

I Wasn't There

When they wrote it, who quote it?
Egypt got demoted or was culture exploited
Hold it, its I the pharaohs eye
Who said the dynasty died?
Who lied and ran to they side?
Was Ramses, Tut and Akhenaten right?
When Europe came was a scheme on they side?
I wasn't there. I don't know
Your lies, your facts, I don' care.
See you was not there,
King James, Napoleon and Anthony
Just the same if you ask me
How Jesus not Middle Eastern?
Let me do a little preaching,
Better yet some soul reaching,
Increasing reason for weaker heathens
But y'all ain't believing
God son ain't European
Point blank
I'm done, now go think.

Still Posted

Again I'm posted, dreaming hoping to go free
And below these, quotes I wrote see, my soul left a hole
In me and if I knew this was how it was gone be,
I'd rather had died in the streets or take three
To my stomach and knees. Nightmares of swat teams,
Searching for me, straight modern slavery,
Save me, I'm grown but I'm still my moma's baby
Maybe I'll just lay low, like those who don't know
Or care to show concern as we sinking below,
From a gangster to now rocking a halo,
Time don't pass it just stay slow,
And forget "Tony" it's G. Bush that push all that yayo
Still it's a box where I stay through
Maybe I should pray mo' oh no,
I'm at the edge of my rope yo' that hangs low,
All this 'cause I'm po' and hated by "po-po"
Like woe, is me visions of hell's degrees
This year is like nails in teeth, I feel so deep,
I praise God but is the devil in me
They want me quiet for the wisdom I speak,
This country is ran by a freak who kiss sheep's
And wanna leave me as I leak in white sheets,
I been through so much shhh that it stinks
Look at all that's been stolen from me,
By phony police that's holding they heat
They seek to meet these emotions in me
Please, what they think I wrote hits for free
All this I spit don't just grow on trees
The world may love it but who knows that it's me
And best believe it's only me
No homies who rolling deep,
And no streets peep this decent being,
You ain't believing inside I'm screaming,
Still gleaming, plus I'll be leaving
And God bless them tough guys 'cause they ain't breathing,
The Lord always gets even with those who scheming,
And I'm past y'all who living uneven
See all I seek is cash flow and deep meaning,
Something to sink your teeth in,
Like cashews, now I ask you...
To face this, because your factors are factless,
The earth is evil axis, like fascists,

WILLIAM HAMBY (CONT.)

All I seek is big faces (cash) stuffed in my mattress,
But the basis is the world hate this,
Many grown men got the mind of a 'tween
In between a weenie an the twitch of a gleam,
Softer than ice cream and my life seems,
The opposite of a nice dream,
But it's the past tense so I let it rest,
This agitation is not contagious,
Hearts broken like fragmentation...
Left my spirit only fractions in places
Gracious we left in ashes, cinders
And still I don't even try to remember,
My ostenous, ostentatious ways of opulence
Outrageous, genius, prophet, I foresee profit,
Was rich now I got lonely pockets,
Somebody reach out and touch me like "Ma Bell" or Verizon
I won't stop flying like "50" I'll die trying
See my souls been torn like lions or vipers rising,
Deeper than scubas diving and them haters ice picks
Ain't stop the breath of the nicest, semi-violent
I bring hell they ain't liking, come roll with a titan,
This be exiting, enticing, royal like caviar icing,
Exotic, why many still trying,
God strike 'em like lighting, I don't do fighting,
Or no melee kung-fu, pele
Jackie Chan, Jet Li, test me
Most sleep, I jet ski
Plus I'm beyond the best I can be
Let my sun shine in reclining, rewind this
'cause I'm fast forward hard to ignore it
bow only to God as we falling,
I always feel my next life calling,
Love enormous external saintly amorous,
They thought us, to be stubborn like Taurus,
but I'm the Aries, this pain don't scare me
Prepare me, be wary they want me buried,
Instantly, the chase me
Still I stand they hunt me, haunt me,
Taunt me, tease me, now I just tell 'em "kill me easy"
From hell release me...
To be continued

BRIAN STAFFORD

This next writer is the cellie of our beloved inspirational genius, Keith Smith, so you know you've got some great writing underneath this introduction. And since they were cellies we know they must've had great conversations as both are wonderful thinkers and stellar writers. He's now in Folsom State Prison, but we're sure he'll continue to write us even without the inspiration of Keith Smith. Read on and let us know what you think. Let's welcome him with open arms into our publication.

A Thought For Today

Today I sat and looked at my life up to this point. I looked at the highs and the lows, the joy and laughter as well as the pain, the tears which were shed when I was born and the tears which cried out when I was given a sentence of thirty-three years to life. None of these things can I change nor rectify.

Friendship was once a gift which I gave freely and those whom I gave of this gift were the ones who betrayed me the most.

Love, there can never be a svuch thing, considering all of those who claimed to be loyal. But where are they now?

Hate, what does it mean? I harbor none, for I can only hate when I am the object of the ill feelings.

Today these things went through my mind as I drifted off into a light sleep. I can't explain why, yet it is the answer that I seek. When or where I will find it I do not know, but I will continue to strive and seek the answers to these things.

The Pallbearer

I live overlooking where
You all rest, sleeping and
Finally finding peace in this
World.

Out of my window I see your
Spirits at play, dancing around,
And blessing those whom you love
By comforting them.

Although at times I myself grow
Tired of the things which this
World puts me through, I stand
Fast in my faith, for one day my time
Will come to rest.

I am the Pallbearer and I will
Maintain my post until the angels
Call out my name, with each rising
Of the sun I punch in on the time
Clock of life, forever striving to
Do what is right, through the four
Seasons I have watched it all, not
Always finding a reason to smile,
Not always having the ability to
Stand tall, I walk alone with my
Dignity, if nothing else, carrying
On the rite of passage until I too
Can find rest.

KEITH SMITH **We think this man may be the most concerned about the younger generation that we know. He's writing from a jail in San Diego and his compassion speaks wonders. This week he's going to the max by laying out a blueprint for success. He lets us know that there are good people out there who are willing to help us out if we want it. But that's the key thing — we have to want it. He's been discovered through our angel and we love his lessons just as much as we love her. Stay tuned for more coming from both Keith Smith and our angel.**

Youth Struggles

To all the youth who are hearing these words, I want to say you are taking some big steps because most youth in your position made some poor choices, but we are learning from our mistakes. There are so many hurdles in life that we have to complete, some big, some small. Some are gangs, schools and alcohol. There is so much peer pressure in the community that we are faced with some serious choices. You're probably saying how would I know?

Well, I'm from the Bay Area, East Palo Alto, and I made some bad choices I my life like cutting school, shop lifting, anything, just trying to fit in with the cool youth. I started going to juvenile hall, then CYA, and now prison because I didn't say "no" to a lot of things in my life. Believe me, I'm sitting writing because I don't want you to have to go through this far to know that you have good in you. Find out what positive things are going on in your community and get involved if you are in juvenile hall. Then you and I are spending much of our day trying to better ourselves and it can be done. So don't think it's too late because of some of your poor choices. Get back in the game and start being positive and watch how far you make it. Tell a friend so he can tell a friend. Like I always say, start by opening up to your parents and let them know that you are ready to change. You can even talk to your workshop teachers because I believe that they can help you set small goals that you can accomplish weekly and watch yourself grow.

Remember if you have the courage you will be stepping into the light with positive choices. Remember loyal Beat Within readers, anything the mind can believe it can achieve. Tell a friend.

To All Of Your Striving Brothers And Sisters

Youth in juvenile halls, and after school workshops who are struggling, trying to get yourself together, I really feel you because sometimes it can be hard after making one or two mistakes. It might seem like everyone is pointing the finger at you, but really they just want you to do the right thing because you made it this far, especially if you are able to read this.

There is no excuse. If you are in the workshop, ask the person next to you what do they want in life. This is 2007 and it's time to compete with no one but yourself. Go after your dream. You can do it and remember, don't be afraid to ask for help because that's part of life. But you know what? At the end of the day, it really works. If you ask yourself what are the consequences for you helping someone it's possible they will like it. Do the same by helping someone else so they can pass it on and that's part of growing, helping people, because what goes around comes around. Even I make mistakes.

Today I'm cleaning up my act. Yes, I'm picking myself up because I'm sitting here in prison telling you all of this because ain't nothing cool about this place. So be positive all the time and remember – anything the mind can believe the mind can achieve.

We All Stumble

Today I must start by saying that God is good because I made it to 2007. What a blessing! I am really proud of myself because I feel like I have made a big change in my life by helping others and I owe a lot of my change to The Beat Within and its writers. You all make a difference in many brothers and sisters lives through many institutions and on the outside. It's really great to know that our voices are being heard and inspiring others to get involved.

Myself, I thank the dedicated writers for reaching out helping the brothers and sisters get focused and save our youth because they are really our tomorrow. So what little light we have, let's keep shining it because with no light it's really scary sometimes. I think most of us been there. I will make an "I" statement. I don't want to be left in the dark and I'm trying to save lives through The Beat Within with no color lines. Happy New Year to all you loyal Beat Within Readers. May God keep the light shining so we don't stumble in the darkness.

MUATA GIFT MUSESA **Let us first start this introduction off by letting you all know where this man is writing from — Maximum Security Prison, Death Row Section in Kabwe, Zambia, Central Africa. We are so grateful to receive a letter from a totally different continent such as Africa and if you want to read more about what this latest letter means to us read the editor's note inside the cover. We published his letter for two reasons. The first is to show how humble he is as we get many people complaining about what they're going through over here, knowing people have it much worse in other places. And secondly to get people to write him through The Beat. Maybe a piece that offers hope, or even a piece that lets him know you feel his pain. Whatever the case let's welcome him as best we can in our pages. We hope he receives this in the highest spirits and hopefully we'll hear from him soon.**

...its my prayer that, by the will of God, I may be answered positively. Your reply shall wipe away my streams of tears.

Dear Servant Of God

Greetings in the most high name of our Lord the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Apologies for any inconvenience my least mail may cause in respect of your schedule, programs, and time.

Allow me to introduce myself: my full name's as follows — Muata Gift Musesa, 30, married and blessed with four children who are desperate. On top of this their mother was just a housewife. To make the matters worse I was they only breadwinner.

Before I go any further, surprised enough to receive a mail from Zambia. I got your address from the magazine. I am humbly re-questing for pen pals. This is due to loneliness, which has gone beyond. I am a prisoner on death now, apprehended in 1999 and convicted to death in 2000. In the third year (2003) I was found with the virus, which causes AIDS. Also my wife was found positive (HIV).

Nevertheless, I have given my life to Christ. Due to the above subject I am so distressed with friendship. Besides I am a foreigner, hail from Angola, spent many years in forest, fed wild fruits. As I was headed northwards, end up in Zambia. As I noted in my preamble my children are desperate, please remember them to eradicate the shell of poverty.

Last but not inferior, its my prayer that, by the will of God, I may be answered positively. Your reply shall wipe away my streams of tears. May God show the blessings upon the whole ministry.

I Am Your Son

Mexico, Mexico
Such a stranger to me, to the sadden eyes
Of my faded memory
Why do I continue to love you my Mexico, land of my blood
When I don't even know you no more, and my blood and pride
Why those it remain the color of yours
Green, white, and red
Mexico, Mexico
How I'll love to be reborn by you, to be your son again
To be your side always, my heart desires to feel
Your touch and soul, so that one day, you may guide
Me back home, into your loving arms. Where I wish to die
Mexico, Mexico
I have long been taken from your cradle arms, of an
Adopted mother, who has tried to blind me of my identity
And strip me of my pride, of the color of my Mexican flag
My adopted mother has tried to harden my heart
Against you, my Mexico
But she has failed. For it's because of my blood and
Your purity, your strength, and pride, that runs
Through my veins, that forces me to seek your
Embrace, not only by watching over our people
But by not forgetting who I am and where I come from
Soy Mexicano, I am Mexican,
Mexico, Mexico
I am your son.

Wisdom

The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step, one must strive with confidence in his own belief and abilities to succeed, we find in the greatness of our past, courage and confidence, in your future, just as a single wave is powered by the ocean, a sincere mind has vast resources at its command. The roads to the future and never ending and its path we choose that will determine the course of our actions. Through strife, all things arise and pass away.

Focus on your surroundings and look closely with great caution, and utilize these observations, along with past experience and good judgment, you need to study the people you hang with and notice reactions of a different nature, part ways from this certain individuals, who live content with their overly exaggerated an phony existence, to do this, turn away with sincere devotions ones principles, let little things remain.

Little in your mind, so you could exercise your mind with bigger and better things. Never look up to others as we all sit and shhh alike, give every man an ear but few a voice, always take a little but leave a lot. It's not what you give that counts. But how you give it. If you know you teach, when you teach, you lead, and when you lead, you lead righteously, it's not the size of a man that counts. But the size of his heart, to fight to survive, results count, no efforts. Let silence be your strength, and take deep breaths of humility, never to inhale the poisons of ignorance, when the time arises, like a lion I will attach, with only deadly intentions.

My tongue should remain dormant only to be awaken by swords of wisdom, that may expect it. With winds of knowledge I will create powerful storms to topple structures of stupidity, forever will I crave fruits of improvement. A craving that will remain insatiable, like an infant I will crawl to speak like a falcon I will fly to listen. And in the end, when my heart will beat and more, I will know that I lived a life of a warrior...

We all possess the power of will, we only have to take the first step and leave behind our ignorant mind. You are, what you put in it. And will stay behind only if you choose to.

JAIME ESTRADA

This next writer could be seen as controversial, for as he offers words of encouragement to the younger generation, he also seems to glorify his past life of gang-banging and violence. Maybe we're taking his words the wrong way, or maybe we know exactly what we're talking about. However, one thing remains true and that's this man has a lot of lessons to teach. He begins with a poem that explains his love for his country and how his adopted mother tried to take that away from him. We feel that sometimes when we're deprived of so much like when we're incarcerated, we tend to attach ourselves to whatever we have left. And sometimes that's our very own culture. As long as we're on a journey to a better way of thinking, it doesn't matter how we get there. And we believe this next writer is definitely getting there. He's writing from Pelican Bay State Prison in Crescent City, CA.

Verde, Blanco, Rojo

I can't control my emotions when I read it through,
The history of my country, I feel pride and honor in finding the truth
How the generals rose to fight against poverty
How they dreamed of a better life, for our people in
Harmony I feel the emotions as I read and imagine
The battles, and in my eyes, somehow I start to see
I start to smell the green pure grass, the smell of
Death of people who has come to past,
I see the white of their purity in their hearts
The red rivers and pools of blood
I start to shed a tear as I feel their pain
The lives of the revolution being stained many lives
Were given to unite our race for the purity and
Honor of the Mexican flag, that hangs and floats
Delicately with grace
Emiliano Zapata you died proudly for the love of your raza
Pancho Villa, still riding on your black horse I thank
You for fighting for us, giving your vida
I thank and honor you both with this poem
You are the pride, which we hold the flag of the Mexican race
Verde, blanco, y rojo, with a fierce eagle in the
Middle, I will honor you with my life forever.

With winds of knowledge I will create powerful storms to topple structures of stupidity, forever will I crave fruits of improvement.

Angel Of Death

We see, we learn, we do
We start acting bulletproof
(Enemies)
Those who deserve killing, it could be any of you
Those who are born to kill
They roam around, they can't stay still,
Killing with full force
Till the heart finally burst
(angel of death)
Whispers in my head
Warrior, striving for success
We see, we learn, we do,
We die, just like the next fool
(angel of death)
Slowly coming for me
Soldier, killer, will die with a knife to the chest
(angel of death)
Finally put to rest
Blood, tears, pain
It all ends the same
We die
In the name of the game

JAIME ESTRADA (CONT.)

A Prisoner's Eyes

The gloom attacks the light
Like a living breathing thing
Monstrous shadows made of time
Is what confinement brings
Repetition perverts the days
Into a rare but constant pain
My soul screams for mercy
Form the cage inside my brain
The walls are harsh impediments
Out of which the nightmare rise
Crushing hope to death
In orbs of promised prisoners eyes

Must be nice! But that ain't me
Caught up in the web, won't
ever be free
searching the way, to not
become the next prey
As death becomes thee

Dragon Slayer

Emotions run through my brain as I think of a
Life of pain
But what is it that holds me together? Of my
Family is slowly leaving me forever,
There is nothing worse than betrayal knowing how life
Is so frail, but coming form your own blood is like
A dagger straight through the heart, is not
Blood thicker than water? You rebel, because you
Grew up without a father? Or because there wasn't
Much love, coming from your mother
I do understand the pain, the hurtful tears pouring
Down like rain, but you're not a kid anymore
You're a grown woman with kids of your own but yet you
Have let them go. Is it monkey did, monkey do?
Let them suffer the same way as you?
Those the chase of the dragon fulfill you? Knowing
One day it will kill you! Who choose a path of our
Own. But being on the chase, you wont reach
To grow old, it hurts me to see you like this
Not being able to hug you or give you a kiss
So snap out of it and get up from the floor
You want to rest in peace? You will, if you don't stop
Chasing the beast. So I'll end this piece
Saying something better. It's time for you
To get your shhh together

Dear Brother

In 2003 I received a letter
I hold it real tight in my hand, really wanting
To know, sketchy to read it, since the context
Was unknown
"Dear Brother"
I write to let you know, our father was
Murdered a few months ago, I'm sorry for not
Writing any sooner, till now didn't know
What to say since there is not much you can do
I'm enclosing a newspaper clipping, you can
See with your own eyes
How they slit his throat from side to side
I had to stop reading to compose myself.
It's terrible news to get through mail
A tear started to leave my eye
But with my pride I couldn't let my cellie see
Me cry
Tell me Lord, do you punish me for my past?
I knew the good times couldn't last
But what could I expect, if I was born with a
Rope around my neck, he wasn't much
Of a father, he was more of a friend that
I cannot understand he did not much for us
You could say he put us though hell and my
Mother through many tears as well
But even knowing his mistake, I still didn't
break, father, friend or foe, he still deserved
To grow old
I feel the world on my shoulders and I
Must let it out
But by telling you how I feel does not
Make me weak. I rather put in on paper
Than cry myself to sleep
People out there go on with their lives
Without a care for me without realizing
One day I'll walk away free
I am as strong as I can be I never needed
Anyone to give me a hand. So I will walk across
Hot sand, in the desert heat. Before I let
Anyone break me
Don't think I don't know what you're trying to hide
I hate honor, I'll never betray my own blood
You know what I'm saying, you know who you are
Don't act like you don't. It may rub you wrong
But it is the right song
I said my peace, I feel so much better, this
Poem is too long, it's more of a letter
So I'll put this to rest, as I wait for death
To come for me next

Days Of Thunder

Dark days, games of death
We slowly start losing our breath
Consequences to the game
Playing Russian roulette
Too many players losing their heads
But what a price!
As some kick back, enjoying a snack
Must be nice! But that ain't me
Caught up in the web, won't ever be free
searching the way, to not become the next prey
As death becomes thee,
Envision the life of the strife
Can't stop, till the eyes finally pop
Dark day, feeling myself through the rain
Violence, is running through my brain
This shhh is whack, like stuck on stupid smoking
Crack, cotton mouth what a drought, feeling messed
Up, knowing this shhh don't stop
Russian roulette
The gun pointed to my head
Waiting for death to come next
Dark days, days of thunder, no snacks
Only hunger, as I keep slowly going under
And under...

What's Up

I hope to catch you chilaxing, even if they try to keep us locked in a box, keep your head up, young bucks, and let your mind break through them walls. Alright then, I would like to ask a minute of your valuable time, to respond and enlighten the young mind of Lil' bro, "writing positive" 150 crew, in The Beat's volume (11.36) are we hypocrites?

Young mind, I think you got the facts all twisted, you're a lil' confused and your driving force is anger, but I respect your point of view, since we all experience life in different shadows, but let's keep it real, since you opened the page, most, let the homies dictate your actions, decisions, (peer pressure) you may not know it's going on. But analyze your life and you will realize it's true, and even if you know it, you keep going back to it. You go back to what you know, looking for validation within your homies, so they can say your down! You get pulled back in again, how is that for a change! Then you write about how people only write about change when they get busted!

Listen! "Isolation" makes the mind rewind and see clearly of life's mistakes, when times get hard. Do we not turn to God in one way or another? But when things get better, we forget of our goal, it's human nature to attach, when we feel threatened, and love when we feel safe, we all express our emotions someway, we write, or cry or rebel. If I take time to enlighten you, young minds is because even if I can't go back, I could teach you a way of life, that it's better, and if you decide you're hard enough to hang with the big boys I hope you meet someone, who will guide you in the best path. There are some words that convicts use and it goes. (I ain't no baby sitter) so when times get rough, you have only yourself to count on, where's your homies in here? They forget about you, as soon as you get locked up. That's why I wrote that piece, "Forgotten" another soldier will take your place, so let's keep it real, young minds, you wont know what you're made of, until you're in hot water, you need to understand for every action, there's a reaction. You better start thinking of #1 "you".

One wrong (yes) then you're writing to The Beat, saying how you crave for a change, to only be back at it, when you get out. To be forgotten again, so I want to let you know. "If you keep wolfing " you gonna find the (one) who's gonna call you out. You gonna have to show what you're about. We're all peas in a pod. But can you stand the boiling water? Welcome to my house, young minds. This poison bullet is out, with a bing, bing, and a bang! Bang! I hope you understand my pieces, (wisdom) (war) I don't preach, I teach!

One wrong (yes) then you're writing to The Beat, saying how you crave for a change, to only be back at it, when you get out. To be forgotten again, so I want to let you know. "If you keep wolfing " you gonna find the (one) who's gonna call you out.

JAIME ESTRADA (CONT.)

War is everywhere. But most of it comes from ignorance, because people have different beliefs, religions, why are we scared? Change is a good thing. But it will all stay the same, if we don't speak up, and teach each other to love our neighbor.

What's Up Familia

Extending my cariño as always. Bringing down the walls for a few precious minutes to share with you some personal poems I hold deep in my Corazon. I expect nothing but a good tough of hope, change but not for me, but for yourselves. This piece, (dear brother) is to enlighten you to, how it feels to not being able to say your last goodbye, or (I love you) I guess we all crave for validation, but validation comes from our own selves. We either accept who we are, or change it.

On another note, we all are very proud of our race, but I'm feeling a lil' sad, of all the immigration situations. Why? Well, where you are born, does not make you Mexican, American, etc. what makes you who you are is your upbringings. If you are born here with Mexican background. And if you do not speak Spanish, does it mean you're not Mexican? If you're white and don't speak your European language, German, etc. Does it not make you white? If you're black and don't speak African, does it not make you African?

This country was built, on immigrant people, but yet, we hate each other? The governvment teaches you to do so. But it's up to us to keep it going or change it. War is everywhere. But most of it comes from ignorance, because people have different beliefs, religions, why are we scared? Change is a good thing. But it will all stay the same, if we don't speak up, and teach each other to love our neighbor. There is a difference between racism and indifference it's called ignorance. So I close with these words. Are you one of them?

War

Born in the promised land and raised among men of
Courage fortunate, I consider myself to have the
Blood I have running through my veins and to
Possess an inherited heart of great ancient warriors
Tills myself with pride
I have chose to live this honorable life, a life
Where my ways revive my roots, where my actions show
My loyalty, and where my word assures my
righteousness
A warrior that is what I have become
A young man that from past experiences in
Conjunction with the aid, of those who I hold
Reverence in my heart
I have assimilated the justification of my acts
And from the true convictions of my beliefs
I obtain the desire to advance and grow
To expand the dominions of my cause so here
I stand on solid ground (proud)
And stout, always embellishing myself
With good qualities, eliminating the
Ignorance that we all possess in the mind
But what is more important, is to keep my
Existence in this life, to keep striving, fighting
Consistently for progress, and my cause,
An inherited Mexican warrior,
That's who I am...

EUGENE WEEMS *It's a crazy coincidence that this next writer decided to give an all out tribute to our soldiers by sending us several pieces having to do with the war and how our soldiers are courageously dying for a cause that our government is trying to keep a secret. We're actually going to be developing a topic that is a tribute to our fallen soldiers. We'll be asking the kids in juvenile hall to write a letter to the family of a fallen soldier. Or a letter from the actual kid to a fallen soldier. And if any of them are even remotely as empathetic as Eugene is for our soldiers, we think it'll make for a great issue. It'll probably be published a several plus weeks from now, so please be on the look out for that. As for Eugene, we really appreciate your concern for our soldiers abroad and just wish everyone had the same compassion as you. The world would definitely be a better place if that was the case... Thank you for having such a big heart. We hope to receive more from you in the near future... What are we saying? We know we will. Eugene Weems wrote this from the county jail in Rancho Cucamonga, Ca.*

On Patrol

Convinced within myself that my cause is worth the leave,
Of family, I could hear my child scream.
Never think about the distance, other wise my heart bleeds,
I miss my children, lord knows, they miss me.
My little ones are uneasy, wondering am I home,
But I'm half a world away, in the middle of a sandstorm.
Each bump in the road annoyed me even more,
Patrolling, in a Humvee, faithful marine corp.,
Shook from in a day dream,
When a bomb explodes vigilantes and dark streets,
One never knows, the dead bodies order,
Carry in the wind strong shoulder to shoulder my unit patrols.
The Humvee motor revs on duty calls;
I can't die tonight got children at home.
So I blot these worried thoughts, and focus to the task at hand,
The enemy has plans, defending my country united we stand.

Brave And Unknown

The sand blown was blinding, assume another pose,
I couldn't see the bullet, but in my chest a hole.
In this world I live in difficult missions and visions,
A mirage in the horizon, a helicopter flying.
Paramedics ran to me surrounding my body cold,
They said I'd make it, but panic seized my bones.
A stretcher unfolds, they tore off my clothes,
Patched my wounds up flown to the hospital.
Alive impossible, these men I didn't know,
No chance to say thank you, but I spoke it in my soul.
I knew my time in war was much better than most,
That day I met valor when I braved the unknown.

Complex Situations

Complex situations worse than a famine,
They wrote a constitution, but confusing things have happened.
The path not open, roadside bombs explodin',
Freedom the people hopin', in the rumble of Wreckage smokin',
Circumstances difficult the violence been
Perpetual, since these criminals making, rebuilding, Impossible.
Lingering death I mention, among religions
Dissention, greater proof I imagine, in the land which loves fighting.
But there some negotiations, to democratic
Solutions, but not too many listen, yelling Revolution.
Never been in this position, a soldier was
Thinkin', suppressed his expression, duty
Calls while others sleeping.
He walked the meanest streets, five
Thousand miles away, they spoke a
Language he didn't know, to his last
Day he stayed.

Inside My Gun Scope

Upon a roof top, I lay on my belly,
Haven't showered, and haven't shaved my gun I hold steady.

They ran the streets bloody, with one eye closed,
I observed my enemy inside my gun scope.
Target was dead center, so I squeezed
My trigger, I was a doctor in my country,
Today I'm a soldier.

My bird eye perch gave me confirmed
Kills, struggled with this dying is this Gods will?
I was told to keep firing, on my stomach I laid still

Convinced within myself that my cause is worth the leave,
Of family, I could hear my child scream.
Never think about the distance, other wise my heart bleeds,
I miss my children, lord knows, they miss me.

We Stand With The Soldiers

We stand united, but orbit in solitude,
Explored so many ways, to express our love for you.
Sacred like the burning bush of Moses on fire,
We remember you soldiers, forever our desires.
You've remained in our vision Corey Miller was saying,
This book is the language of God when he's praying.
Many will never know the few inside this fold
Such as Fabian Khamo a living inferno
The memories of all the fallen, shall never be forgotten,
Imagine this happening, Kimberlaine "Black Diamond" Johnson.
The eternal was stirring in Mister Eugene Weems,
Ideas re-occurring, never gave up the dream.
Medicine for the sick, poetry was but a gift,
Your battles are important to the team that made this.
"The freshness of dawn began to swell by God;
We stand United with all the troops abroad."

Mother Nature

She walked into my day, a wreath of pleasure;
Her silhouette was many shapes, charm beyond measure.
She was heat when I was cold,
Sowing threads in my soul so many sad songs, sung, pacing to and fro. The knowledge of angels only ripened her fruit,
Enchanting elegance, but a handful in truth.
Her wants impractical, her mood impractical, her mood impossible,
I over came these obstacles, and found that heavens tangible.
She was bashful, so I built her a castle,
She stood by the window, whispering it's "beautiful".
Far off saw the meadows, the trees and waterfalls,
And that very night, she sang me a song.
Her love was musical, silk to skin, we laid upon the sheets,
And then fairy tails were written.
Entrusted with a gift, I began to paint a picture,
And that's what its like, to be one with Mother Nature.

EUGENE WEEMS (CONT.)

Untitled

All the goodness in the world must be poured
In this country, I can't understand the debate politically.
Do you want me home, after all my blood
Spilled? I died for a cause and a belief,
That must not fail.
I'm watching from a distance, is another
Solar system, I haven't died for nothing, so
Don't you try leaving.
The war stands for something, politicians
You better listen, we shall prevail,
My brothers are staying, and god blesses them.

I'm Sorry

She was crying but only three, a little Iraqi baby,
Her mother was slaughtered, while she watched the blood leak.
I was on duty, but I felt such grief,
Because any little girl her age shouldn't have to see.
Such hostilities, upon these hard streets,
No one paid her mind, as she cried for me.
I was trained to be a soldier, but this scene is not me,
I hugged the little girl and whispered I'm sorry...

The Right To Cry

The greatest men that ever moved, came from a soldiers wounds, their hearts survive the booms, of war when the night looms.

Despite these conditions, our men complete the missions;
The soldiers never yield, learning new lessons.

Roaming the battlefields, generals became pleased,
Determined beyond grief, humanity needs marines.

And armies and navies, air force guard the skies,
Others provide supplies, the war might never die.

Cannon fires into the night, oh such vigorous minds.
These stars and stripes as I unraveled the flag that keeps our hope alive.

These are the men that have earned the right to cry.

We Stand United

When that morning arrived
Alas it burned my mind.
Crucified and sacrificed,
A tragedy brings a sign.
I saw the bird rise,
Some people thought he died.
Despite the flames and smoke
Sometimes it's hard to climb.
But it's endless to the sky,
Oh shine eagle of mine,
I'm inclined to be divine
In a world beyond this time.
Overcame mortality with cause that made me fly,
We stand united for all those who died.

ROBERT HERRINGTON

We have a first time writer on the loose and he's incredible. He's writing from the Sumter Correctional Institution in Bushnell, Florida, and is a friend of veteran Beat writer Kenneth Floyd. He hits us with one of the best poems we've read in a long time, "Imagine." In this poem he describes what life is like in jail for those who have no clue. We're sure there are many people out there that have no clue. And as he describes it, you can tell he was aiming for a particular audience. Certainly not preaching to the choir, we respect the description he gave for incarceration.

Imagine

Imagine a world where time stands still
Where nothing you do is of your own will
Stripped of freedom, hope and pride
Surrounded by strangers with nowhere to hide
Imagine a place where you're told what to do
A place where no one is allowed to choose
You're told each day that you're not to talk
And told where you can and cannot walk
A world where you sleep surrounded by hate
Where all you do is sit and wait
Imagine a world where you don't have a voice
Where you can't even think because of the noise
A world where you work but get no pay
And are made to feel worthless each and every day
A world where your days crawl by like a snail
Where all you hope for is a piece of mail
A world where you live to eat your meal quick
Does that sound like a world that would make you sick?
Imagine a world surrounded by wire
To leave this world free is your greatest desire
Is a world like this so hard to conceive?
Then open your mind and start to believe
I live in this world and they won't let me leave
But with God in my life
I am already free.

Imagine a world where you don't have a voice
Where you can't even think because of the noise
A world where you work but get no pay
And are made to feel worthless each and every day

This country was built, on immigrant people, but yet, we hate each other? The government teaches you to do so. But it's up to us to keep it going or change it. War is everywhere. But most of it comes from ignorance, because people have different beliefs, religions, why are we scared? Change is a good thing. But it will all stay the same, if we don't speak up, and teach each other to love our neighbor. There is a difference between racism and indifference it's called ignorance. So I close with these words. Are you one of them?

check out the rest of Jaime Estrada's BWO piece on page 65